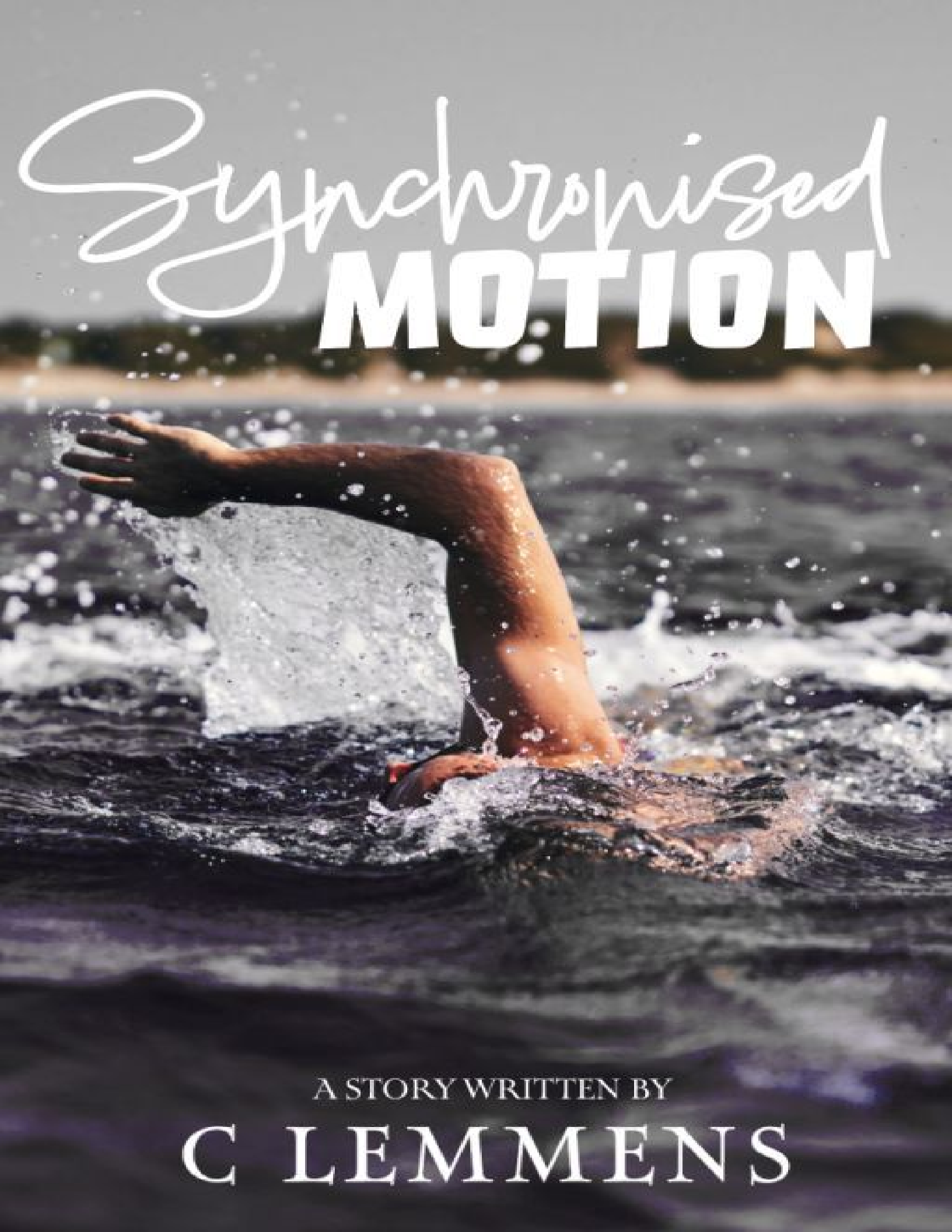
Synchronised MOTION



A STORY WRITTEN BY

C LEMMENS

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Chapter 1

I let the crowds noise fade into the background. All my attention on the water, on the synchronised motion of my arms and legs.

My muscles churn and ache painfully and beautifully. My lungs protest for breath, but I don't stop. Not when the guy in the lane beside me is ahead of me.

I push harder.

But not matter how hard I push he matches it and more. It infuriates me. *He* infuriates me.

I near the end not even bothering to spare a second to breathe. *I need to beat him.* Soon my hand is hitting the end of the pool and I surface the water. My chest is rising and falling rapidly as I struggle for air. My muscles aching and lungs desperate for oxygen.

But the boy in the lane beside has already surfaced the water. He has already finished the race. He has won the race.

He is Oliver Fowler.

An easy grin plastered across his face. Droplets of water running down his face and hair clinging to his forehead. He is casually leaning against the pool wall with a grin. His eyes glinting as he looks at me and that pisses me the fuck off.

My eyes narrow on him, silently sending him daggers. His grin only widens. "Motherfucker" I swear lightly under my breath as I slam my fist against the pool wall in frustration.

Why can I never beat him? Why does he always win? I really though I had him that time.

A drop of water drizzling down his tan muscular chest as he effortlessly pulls himself out of the pool. I swallow deeply before getting out of the pool. My arms shaking slightly as I pull myself out.

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This is fucking torture I think dragging a hand over my face. Most people would be happy to be where I stand, on the podium in second place. Maybe I would be if it wasn't Oliver Fowler standing beside me in 1st.

But I can't help the uncomfortable burn of jealousy in my chest. I can't help the sour taste in my mouth. I can't help but feel bitter.

The crowd celebrates as Oliver gets a golden medal placed over his head. All eyes are watching him. It's like the whole crowd is magnetised towards this him. He can't help but draw attention. He naturally draws peoples attention medal or no medal.

I see everyone's dazed expressions. He has everyone wrapped around his finger and he doesn't even know it. He smiles triumphantly head held high. His eyes flick to me and I shift my jaw ignoring his eyes burning holes in the side of my face.

It is no secret that Oliver fowler infuriates the fuck out of me. He is their star, the colleges golden boy. He is perfect. Too perfect.

My eyes skim the crowd in more depth. Looking for the brown eyes that mirror my own. He is not here, yet I keep on looking. As if looking harder will make his face appear. My thin string of hope finally snaps, and I give up on looking. I raise my eyes to the roof biting back the emotion rising to my chest.

I am thankful when we get to hop off the podium and away from the crowd. There's a buzz in the locker room. Everyone still on high on the adrenaline. High from the rush of racing In front of such a large crowd.

Across from me is Oliver and his friends. I block out their annoying chatter. I can't help but roll my eyes at the amount of compliments and

congratulations everyone is showing him with. I grab my phone.

No notifications.

I let out a puff of breath. Dad didn't even text saying he wasn't going to come. I scoff, *I should know better than to get my hopes up.*

A slap on my back draws my attention away from my phone.

"You do realise you need oxygen to live, right?" Andy says.

I roll my eyes at him shoving the rest of my shit in my bag. Andy is the only person on the swim team that I don't mind the company of.

"Of course, dipshit." I grunt.

"Then try breathing every once in a while in aye? Might help" He snorts.

I shrug unapologetically, "I breath once and Fowler is a fucking 3 feet Infront of me" I say, shrugging on a shirt.

Andy barks out a laugh shaking his head, disbelieving. "Man, you just don't quit do you. Oliver is *untouchable. J* ust face it, you're going to kill yourself trying to beat him"

Oliver is the best swimmer on the team- hence why he is the swim squads captain. But swimming is the only thing I got and I am not going to let him take that away from me.

"You just wait Andy, I'll have him one day." I say back nonchalantly.

Andy sighs, giving up. I hang behind as Andy and the other boys leave not ready to go home just yet. I like to be the last one to leave. Don't know why, just do.

Soon it is just Oliver and I left.

The tension in the room is thick, suffocating. *Time to get the fuck out of here.* I grab my bag sling it over my shoulder.

"You shouldn't hold your breathe." Oliver says breaking the silence. "I mean in a race, you shouldn't skip breath's." His voice is surprising soft.

I glance up to him to see his dark eyes already on me. His blond hair wet making it a dark sandy colour.

I shift my jaw. I didn't realise the golden boy was listening to my conversations.

"Fuck off Golden boy. Why don't you just mind your own goddamn business" I hiss, grabbing my bag and walking past him.

He scoffs shoving me lightly but unexpectedly, causing me to stumble back into the wall.

"What's your problem?" He says, his eyes searching mine.

"You. Now get the fuck out my way" I scowl. I try take a step but he pushes me back; right back into the wall.

"Or what, huh?" He challenges.

My eyes widen in shock. Oliver the sweet charming golden boy, biting back. I have never so much seen the golden boy raise his voice, let alone loose his cool. It was starting to get unnerving how calm he always was.

I can't help but smirk, "That's is not very golden boy of you" I pretend to pout, loving how angry he is getting.

He wastes no time closing the distance between us."Why do you keep calling me that? Stop calling me that." He says through gritted teeth, holding eye contact with me. His usual smile gone and his eyes a shade darker than usual. He is so close right now that I can see speaks of yellow in his blue eyes. I would almost think it pretty if I didn't dislike him so much.

I straighten my spine, trying to close the height difference. That couple of inches he has on me that seems to go on for fucking miles. He can be fucking intimidating when he wants to be.

"Fuck off Fowler. Rich loving family, golden boy of the college, bet you even have pretty little perfect girlfriend. You are the definition of a golden boy", I sneer.

He mirrors the illusion of a calm composure, like he always does. But a muscle in his jaw twitches and I know I have gotten under his skin. And that gives me so much satisfaction.

I let a lazy smile come to my lips. "Don't worry golden boy", I pretend to brush dust off his shoulders. "I'm sure your pretty girlfriend won't mind you're late for dinner"

He lets out a strangled laugh placing a hand against my chest pushing me back against the wall. Hard.

"If I am so golden how come I am doing this huh?"

My brows furrow. "Doing wha-"

I don't have time to finish my sentence because Oliver Fowler slams his lips onto mine.

Chapter 2

I am early, and I am ***never*** early.

I am sitting on the bench beside the pool at 5:45am, waiting for the rest of the team to show up.

I am definitely not early so I can avoid seeing a certain someone in the changing rooms... Because that certain someone kissed me.

His lips connected very much to mine. Skin on skin.

My mind goes completely black, all train of thought lost.

He stays there for a good few seconds as I stand frozen unmoving. He breaks away from the kiss but is still close enough that his lips are lightly brush against mine as he speaks.

"Not so golden huh" He grunts, before spinning on his heel and walking out.

I stand there for a few seconds, my mind still processing what just happen.

Did Oliver Fowler, the University's golden boy, just kiss me?

I sigh running a hand through my messy hair trying to shake the memory from my mind. Because I *totally* haven't been thinking about that all weekend...

It is too fucking early to be thinking this much.

The other swimmers start to walk in and my body tenses in anticipation.

Oliver walks through, a big smile on his face and the centre of attention as usual. It is maddening how much people like him. How they worship him like he is some sort of god.

After the squad gets changed they come out and stand with me waiting for Coach. I cautiously eye Oliver, but he doesn't even glance my way. I let out a short breath I didn't realise I was holding. Good, maybe we can just ignore what happened yesterday.

Andy comes over to me slapping my shoulder.

"Sup man!"

I shrug his hand off my shoulder fixing him with a scowl, "Could you be any louder? It is fucking 6:00"

He snorts sitting next to me. "I see you are just a ray of sunshine in the mornings"

I roll my eyes but don't say anything.

"Hey so did your Dad come to the comp last week?"

I pick up some loose strands in my towel. "Nah he got busy."

Andy frowns but doesn't say anything which I am thankful for.

Oliver clears his throat drawing everyone's attention. "Coach is away so I am running training today." He smiles, eyes scanning the crowd. "Don't think I will be going easy on you" he says, his eyes landing on me.

I gulp.

If looks could kill. Oliver Fowler would be well past dead right now. He would be well acquainted with hell right now by the glare I am shooting his way right now.

No one has given me such a hard time at training as he has been, and I have had **a lot** of swim coaches.

While everyone else seems to love him. Obediently doing what he says, complimenting him and basically being major suck-ups.

I hate them all.

The girls flutter their eyelashes at him and giggle more than usual. I swear everyone is swimming hard than usual, just to impress him. I can't help but roll my eyes every time the girls whisper about how dreamy he is to each other.

While I hate to admit it, he knows his stuff. He wouldn't be that bad of a coach if he wasn't constantly targeting me.

All the fucking time.

Every fucking second he is critiquing and correcting me. He is always watching me, I can't seem to catch a break.

While Oliver is talking to one of the girls about her stroke and I am finally out of the spotlight Andy swims over to me. He raises an eyebrow at me.

"What did you do to get on his bad side?"

I shrug. I honestly don't know, I mean he was the one who kissed me!

He eyes me carefully, "I have never seen Oliver be so harsh on someone before. And it's not like your swimming bad, hell your swimming better than everyone here"

I arch an eyebrow, while I know I am one of the best swimmers on the team, Andy admitting it is another thing.

He shoves my shoulder roughly. "Don't let it get to your head dick", he groans.

I can't help but let a chuckle.

"Lipski!" Oliver's low voice calls instantly wiping my smile. "Stop playing around. Swim another lap of freestyle for me." He commands.

I clench my jaw pushing off the wall to do another lap.

Oliver let everyone finish training early. 20 minutes ago.

But I am still here.

Apparently, my free stroke isn't good enough. so I have been swimming lap after lap until Oliver is content.

I lean against the side of the pool panting. My muscles are aching and I am utterly exhausted. While I am all about pushing myself to my limits, I am well past my limit.

What I would give right now to crawl back into my warm soft bed.

Whatever point he is trying to make, I get it. He wants to get back at me for yesterday, to show he's the captain or whatever. I will make it my personal effort to avoid him now. A 2 hour swimming practice is enough I don't need extra punishment.

"Is that good enough" I grit out, hands fisted. I ran a hand through my wet hair and down my face.

He stands beside the pool towering over me. The heat from his stare makes me nervous. He rubs his jaw frowning. A slight stubble is starting to grow, it makes him look older.

"Go again. Keep your hips higher this time"

I slap the water in frustration. *He has got to be kidding.* But I look up to see his expression fully serious. I refrain myself from flipping him the bird.

With my eyes narrowed I give him one last glare before starting another lap.

After another 5 minutes later and Oliver finally lets me go.

I rush to get changed, barely making it to my lecture on time. I sit in the back of the lecture room.

A wave of dizziness overwhelms me and I lay my head in my arms closing my eyes for a moment. My body is aching all over and I can't decide what sounds better, puking or passing out?

I struggle to stay awake throughout the class. But I am so tired and fucking hungry. My stomach is growling loudly, I would be embarrassed if I had the energy to care.

By the time I make it back to my dorm room, I am ready to pass out. I collapse onto my bed a heap of sore muscles and chlorine.

Chapter 3

I clench my teeth, this was a **bad** idea. I should have just pretended I was sick or something instead of coming. "Alright team, we are changing training up a bit today." Coach says.

The squad is currently in the university's gym class room early in the morning. I let out a yawn rubbing my tired eyes. If there is one thing I hate about swimming, it is the early mornings. My eyes slide to Oliver standing next to coach. His arms crossed, confidence radiating off of him.

"So you guys might already know, Oliver is studying to become a chiropractor and taking some biomechanics and sport science papers. So, I though it would be beneficial for him give us a talk today. We want that national title this year so when need every advantage we can get." Coach grins, clapping his hands together.

Some of the team hoots and cheers in response. I roll my eyes slouching in my seat. I would rather be swimming then hearing this bullshit, especially from *him* .

Oliver steps forwards. "Alright so I thought I would just gives a little overview on the muscles you should be training at the gym for each discipline. Each discipline require a combinations of different muscles and knowing which muscles to target is helpful for strength and conditioning." He says, an easy smile on his face.

The girls in the squad are biting their lips watching Oliver intently, a dreamy look in their eyes. I scoff looking away.

Olivers eyes skim the crowd, "Can I have volunteer to help me demonstrate the muscles." He says, flashing his charming smile to everyone. Nearly everyone shoots their hand up- well everyone except me. Seems like everyone is eager to impress the captain.

My scowl deepens.

I glance over at Andy beside me and see even he has his hand up too. *Traitor* .

When I look back to Oliver I am surprised to see that his eyes are fixated on me.

"Beau, come here"

That mother fucker.

"My hand is not up dipshit." I grunt, folding my arms across my chest and leaning back further in my chair.

Coach sends me a disapproving look.

"That wasn't question." Oliver says calmly, his eyes daring and voice commanding.

I give an annoyed sigh and reluctantly get out of my chair grumbling incoherent curse words under my breath as go.

"Firstly let's take look at the muscles we use in butterfly." Oliver says taking a step closer to me, closing the distance between us. I swallow harshly.

He turns me around so my back is facing everyone. I gnash my teeth together but comply grudgingly.

"Now this", he places a hand on my shoulder, "is the deltoid. We use this," his hand slides to the part between my shoulder and neck. "the trapezius," His hand lowers down the back of my neck between my shoulder blades and I can't contain the shiver that runs through my body. "and the rhomboid major and minor predominantly in the upper body for butterfly."

I let out a breath I didn't realise I was holding as he removes his hand from me. He goes on to the squad about exercises that would be beneficial to strengthen those muscles and some more biology bullshit. I turn around folding my arms against my chest with an unimpressed expression my face. Though it seem the squad is hanging onto every word Oliver is saying.

"For breaststroke we use all the calf muscles, quadriceps and hamstrings" He turns back to me, his finger tips lightly brushing the sides my thighs lightly, I divert my eyes to the roof trying to stop the blush threading to rise. "And the pectoral major" He places his hand on my chest. I bite my lip as his touch sends electrical shocks through my body.

This times he doesn't removes his hand, and I am really struggling to hear what he is saying right now. My heart beating so loud in my ear. I am extremely thankful when he removes his hand, but it is short lived because he grasps my upper arm.

"the biceps and triceps are prominently used for freestyle" His fingers are hot on my bare skin. His hand slides down my back, "And the gluteus-"

"-yea alright" I say stepping away from his hand. "We get the point" I grumble going back to my seat, my face undoubtably burning red.

He chuckle softly, eyes glinting. "So those are the muscles we want to target. Coach and I have set up some exercises to do that specifically for these muscles." Oliver says, his eyes a shade darker then usual.

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Coach and Oliver weren't easy on us. Not at all. My muscles are currently spamming from how hard I pushed them. Doesn't help that Oliver is breathing down my shoulder every minute while Andy is shooting me furtive looks every once in awhile.

"What is it with you? Why is Oliver so fascinated with you?"

I pause in my bench press and glance to him to see that he has stopped doing what he was doing and it look at me with a curious confused expression.

"Ah what do you mean?"

"That guy is loved by everyone, hell everyone wants his attention. Yet he always tries to help *you* in swim trainings. The guy who is rude, has no filter and always a pain in his ass. *No offence* "

I shrug, "Non taken, it's true. What's you point though?"

"What I mean Is that he hasn't gone fucking 5 minutes away from you yet. Always coming back to check if your technique or that you are pulling the right weight and shit." Andy says frowning. "And while you cute Beau, Tasha and Sophie are fucking stunning, I would be taking them in there offers to help them if I were Oliver. Yet instead he turns them down them down to come and correct your technique" He's says, brow arched.

I roll my eyes, "Don't overthink it Andy, he only does that to piss me off, okay."

Andy looks unconvinced but don't say anything back. I don't know why Andy is reading so much into this? We hate each other's guts, that's the end of the story. There is absolutely, most definitely NO romantic feeling between us whatsoever.

Chapter 4

I hate Oliver Fowler.

Why?

Once you see him- you will understand.

At first, you will be envious, because how is it fucking unfair for one's body to be so... *perfect* . For the combinations of his features to be so perfect. For ones face smile to be so perfect.

Truth is it isn't fair.

No person should be so genetically blessed. They have a biological advantage over the rest of us. They hold power over us, a power which can be used... *dangerously* .

Then you will start to get to know him. You will figure out that he is a whole-lot-more-harder to hate because he is a kind, charming son of a bitch. Then you may start to be friends, (you will probably get along with him because he gets along with everyone). Next, you will probably want more from him- as most do.

You will most likely be left high and dry, ultimately heartbroken and crushed. Because the golden boy is a prude, he doesn't go out with anyone- *much to people's complaints.*

Then there's the second option; you will be bitter and annoyed that you can never be quite as nice, quite as good of a swimming, and quite as admired as him.

Then you will hate him.

You will kinda wish someone as perfect as he didn't exist. Because they are a constant reminder of what you are not, what you will never be- no matter

how hard you try.

Most, if not all, people fall into the first category. Except for me, I most definitely fall into the second category.

And I can't help but hate him even more right now. Because everyone is staring at him like he is a fucking god. Like he is the solution to all their problems. Like he is great eye candy.

Well, the latter is kind of hard to deny when his muscles flex as his large form stretches, and he has *a lot* of muscles.

"Focus," The coach says to the squad.

I claw my hand through my hair in exasperation. Kind of fucking difficult when Oliver is not distracting everyone on the swim team and any bystanders. He stretches his toned nicely sculptured body by the diving board.

Now as swimmers we are pretty used to seeing a lot of skin. We *should* be used to skin.

But this isn't just anyone's skin- *it's Olivers* .

And it is flawless. He is undeniably attractive (- *not that I am attracted to be him ... he is attractive to most people is what I mean*).

And - holy shit - the guy knows what he is doing too. He wears a smug grin on his face, easy and relaxed under all the attention- probably loving it, to be honest.

He bites his lip when our eyes connect. A smug expression on his face and it drives me insane. Really insane- like I could punch his stupid face insane.

I suppress the anger that rises in me. Because punching the swim captain wouldn't be a good idea. *No matter how tempting it is* .

"Alright everyone, so we are having a time trial today. Oliver will start us off then everyone else will go one at a time"

Oliver crouches low over the diving board, his arms holding the board tight as he leans his body weight backward.

Coach blows the whistle and Oliver dives into the water, graceful as fuck.

Oliver is the epitome of smooth. His movements are strong and well-rehearsed. He looks like he was made to swim. It is so natural to him, that much is easy to see.

In no time he is back touching the wall, signaling to Coach to pause the stopwatch.

That is when I realised I was fucked.

Because that was fast.

Really fast.

Coach lets out a low whistle of appreciation. The swimmers are shaking their heads, admiration, and respect in their eyes.

He pushes himself out of the pool pulling his cap off and running a hand through his hair.

The team shower him with praise, as expected. I am pretty sure he just set a new record. The kid didn't come to play today, in fact, I have never seen him look so... determined. Like he wants to prove himself or something, which is crazy cause he already has everyone's respect and admiration.

His eyes connect with mine, and I quickly divert mine not wanting him to think I am fan girling over him like the rest of the swim team.

Because I am most definitely *not* .

There is no world where I would ever fan girl over *Oliver Fowler* . He already has enough fans and I refuse to be another one.

Andy nudges my shoulder, "Still think you can beat him, Beau?" He says, his voice dripping with smugness.

"I don't know Andy, still a virgin?"

He shoves me hard and I stumble back a bit chuckling. His cheeks now a dark red.

"Shut the *fuck* up"

I hold my arms up in surrender. "No judgment man, take yo-"

"You little bitch" Andy interrupts. I can practically see the steam coming out of his ears.

It's cute, *really* . He looks like an angry little elf or something. It's like aggravating a cute teddy bear, you just can't take them seriously.

My smile is instantly wiped when a wet muscular arm wraps across my shoulder and chest from behind. Heat omitting from his skin.

"Beau being a bitch? *No way...* " Oliver says sarcastically, his chest slightly vibrating against my back as he holds me to him.

I scowl while Andy laughs, looking at Oliver with fucking stars in his eyes.

It's weird because Oliver's skin is wet yet when my skin touches him it feels like fire. His skin triggers an unwelcome tingling feeling through my body.

I try to shrug him off, but his hold is strong. I feel him lean by my ear, his hot breath brushing my ear.

"Come on little bitch, it's your go," he says, his voice lowered, just for my ears.

"Ah... Y-yeah" I clear my throat, " *right.* "

Thankfully Oliver releases me and my brain can function properly again.

My timed trial goes well- just not well enough to top Olivers. Which was expected, but it still frustrates the fuck out of me.

The squad has a party this Friday and while I am not normally the most social person, I could use a drink. *Even* if that means being forced to be in close proximity of Oliver Fowler.

Chapter 5

This is one of the rare occasions that I am doing something other than swimming and studying. I am at the party the swim team was talking about and I desperately need a drink.

Like right now.

I don't know how much more I can hear Tasha, Sophie, Ben, and Dany drone on about swimming. I came here to get away from that, to get a break. It is when they start to talk about how Oliver and how he will 'definitely' bring our university the gold this season that I decide to take my leave and go find a drink.

The kitchen is easy to find. There are a lot of alcohol choices and no one is there, *perfect* . So the most important question of tonight: what is my poison? Tequila or vodka? Eh, why not a bit of both?

My future self is going to hate me.

"Why are you drinking tonight?" A deep voice says startling me.

I spin around to find Oliver leaning against the kitchen door frame. He has a drink in hand and looks relaxed, more than usual. I wonder how much he has had to drink?

" *Huh* ?"

"You drinking to have fun or forget?"

I ponder for a moment before speaking, "Bit of both."

He nods thoughtfully, then he takes a big gulp of whatever is in his red cup. He grimaces slightly at the taste. I am quite shocked to see him drinking.

Because I have *never* seen Oliver Fowler drink before.

We have been to a lot of the same parties and he always politely declines drink offers, preferring to be sober. He is probably one of those people who is all about only putting good stuff into your body. About treating your body as a temple and shit.

But he is drinking tonight. And that makes me curious.

"Why are you drinking?"

He looks slightly embarrassed, rubbing the back of his neck. "I'm actually drinking for neither of those reasons..."

I tilt my head to the side, confused.

He looks down at the cup in his hand. "I'm drinking for some, *confidence* "

That makes me raise my eyebrows. *When has Oliver Fowler ever needed confidence?* The guy has too much of it if I say so myself.

He sees my expression and gives me a sheepish grin. "I trying to gain the confidence to tell the person I like, that I *like* them..."

" *Oh* ," I say, but it is distant to my own ears. I never knew Oliver *liked* someone. I have never thought too long about it to be honest, I mean the guy is never romantically involved with *anyone* . I just kind of assumed he liked being by himself. Or that he was asexual.

But that doesn't seem like the case, because he *does* like someone...

I don't know why but I feel weird about it. I feel even more weird about feeling weird.

Weird .

"When have you ever needed confidence?" I ask cautiously, unsure of why he needs it because there is no way this person will turn him down. They couldn't possibly, *It's Oliver* for god sake, the university's pride and joy. It is hard to find a flaw in the guy. The majority of university students admire him and have a crush on him. I mean I can't even count the number of

people that flirted with him tonight. Or just blatantly stare at him with a dreamy longing look in their eyes.

He bites his lip, almost nervously. "Well, the person I like isn't the most... *approachable* "

I turn back to my drink, my back facing him. "Well I'm sure they like you just as much if not more, so just go up to them and shoot your shot" I grumble, glaring at my cup. I rub my jaw, I can't believe I am helping the guy I hate most right now. It must be the alcohol because I am never voluntary this nice. Sober me would never be so nice to him.

I hear him step closer. "Shoot my shot aye?" He sounds amused.

"Yeah, you know? Like go up to them and tell them you like them or kiss them or something"

He hums thoughtfully. "I would like to kiss them, *a lot* . But I'm not too sure if they would like that..."

Now I'm confused.

Cause I'm pretty certain nearly everyone at this party would have a heart attack if he kissed them. A hard attack in a good way (if that's possible). The guy is gorgeous, you would have to be blind to not find him attractive.

I turn to him to find him much closer than before but I don't pay much attention to it.

"Who the fuck do you like?" I say bluntly because I'm curious. Who is this person that has caught Oliver Fowler's attention? I was adamant about the guy being asexual with the amount of women that have tried to get in his pants.

"He's-"

"He's a *he* ?" I interrupt eyebrows nearly through the roof. "Your... *gay?"*

Not that I have anything against being gay, I am just surprised. Oliver is like the poster guy for straight white college guys. I know that is presumptuous of me, but can you really blame me? Because when you look at Oliver and see how he acts I get straight vibes. Or maybe my radar is just really *off* .

His response is delayed, "I don't know. I have always liked women, but I think I'm gay too... *just for him* ." He quickly adds. "I think he made me... *gay* ," he says, a light pink dusting his cheeks.

Wow.

My mind is blown. Like exploded into millions of pieces and unable to function properly anymore.

I am nonplussed. Speechless.

Oliver is eyeing me carefully like he is absorbing my reaction cautiously.

Oliver must really like this guy.

He moves closer. "I think I'm gonna shoot my shot now"

Suddenly mad. " *Fine* . Go shoot your fucking shot."

He steps a step closer grinning his annoying stupid smirk. "I will"

" *Good* . I'll get out of your way then" I say stepping out of his way and start towards the door.

I don't get very far, because I am shoved right back into the wall.

Chapter 6

He moves closer. "I think I'm gonna shoot my shot now"

I spin around to face him, suddenly mad. "Fine. Go shoot your fucking shot."

He steps a step closer grinning his annoying stupid smirk. "I will."

"Good. I'll get out of your way then" I say stepping out of his way and start towards the door.

I don't get very far, because I am shoved right back against the wall.

What the fuck?

"No, I think you can stay in my way."

I furrow my brows, my back pressed firmly against the wall.

"What?"

Oliver steps forwards again, getting in my space. "I'm trying to shoot my shot..."

"Yeah well a good start would be shooting ur shot with the person you actually *like* ", I sneer.

He grits his teeth. "You can't be civil for one second, can you Beau?"

I grin, proud that I made the man of stone composure and calmness mad. *It is truly an accomplishment.*

"I don't know Fowler? Have you drank enough to work up the confidence to shoot your shot, or you still too nervous?" I taunt. I know I am being a dick but I can't help it, Oliver gets on my nerves.

His jaw rolls. "Yes, I have", he grunts. "But you're making it *very* difficult."

I arch an eyebrow, "If I recall correctly, you're the one who stopped me. You can go perform your declaration of affection to whoever you like any time," I wave my arm in front of me, "go ahead, I'd love some entertainment."

He chuckles, but it's humourless. " *Alright then* , how should I go about it? What would be the most entertaining way to go about it *for you?"* He questions leaning closer his voice is several octaves lower.

I try to ignore how good he smells and grin, happy he is playing along. *I am so going to have some fun with this.*

"Well... You gotta go big or go home *ya know* . So make it public, make it extravagant. But firstly ya got to make him jealous, maybe go kiss a chic and make sure they are looking. If they look jealous, then *Bingo* - go ahead with the plan. Next get onto the table, the centre of everyone's attention. Do a shotgun, for extra confidence of course." I say smirking, flicking him a wink.

"Then do a little party trick, something fun, something that shows them you can be smooth. And last but not least, finish off with being face to face with the guy. If he licks his lips when you talk to him then that is a good sign. Give him a big smooch, then you got the guy golden boy" I say, a big grin on my face.

There is no way Oliver would ever do that, It crosses too many of his lines. Kissing randos, drinking, and party trick.

Oliver is not the type of guy to kiss random people he barely knows, he is fussy, and he doesn't go around swapping silva with people—it is just not his jam. Oliver isn't a big drinker, that is why me being a dick I said do a shotgun. While he might be drinking a little that is a lot more than he normally would do, he has probably never done a shotgun before. And the party trick, the kid rarely even dances at parties, there is no way he would have a party trick.

Hence there is NO WAY Oliver Fowler is going to do that.

He just wouldn't.

He nods, his expression stoic and not giving anything away. Then the fucker *leaves* . He spins on his heels and leaves me in the kitchen shocked and still leaning against the wall.

Is he...

No. *No way.*

He would never... *Right?*

I walk back into the lounge because I am curious, there is no fucking way golden boy would do that.

He is easy to spot because he is so fucking tall, he is nearly a head taller than everyone else. I can see a few girls surrounding him already, their eyes undressing him.

He is already the centre of attention and he just got there.

Oliver's eyes are focused on the blonde chic who is running her hands slowly up his chest and biting her lip in a flirty way. She is wearing a short red dress that leaves little to the imagination. She looks very into Oliver. Most of the girls do, but he seems to focus his attention on her. She is pretty, she is hot. But she has nothing on golden boy.

He raises his head, looking back at the doorway entry where I am standing. His eyes are dark, challenging, and determined. Keeping his eyes on me the whole time he leans forwards and kisses her.

The guy actually kisses her! My jaw slacks.

I have never seen him kiss anyone- (*well except for me).*

It isn't PG either, my stomach rolls creating an uncomfortable feeling in my body. The girl looks to be enjoying this thoroughly, pressing her body as close as she can get to his. I want to divert my eyes, but I don't. I want to

pull her off of him, but I don't. Instead, I stand there, motionless, watching like a sucker.

He opens his eyes and they connect with me and then fucker winks at me. He *winks* .

Cocky son of a bitch.

He breaks away from her and I am glad. She is not good enough for him. She is not perfect like him, he should be with someone perfect like him.

He doesn't stop there, he jumps up onto the table gaining hoots and cheers from the crowd. He already has everyone's attention from kissing that girl, the envious looks from other girls, and surprised looks of guys. People eye the girl, probably wondering what is so special about her that Oliver Fowler, the guy who doesn't kiss anyone kissed *her* .

I mentally scold myself, I was too busy watching them kiss I didn't see who he looked at.

Who he has a crush on...

He smirks, relaxed and confident. *Pfff* and to think the guy wanted more confidence- this must be one hell of a person he has a crush on if they make *him* nervous. He grabs a drink from the table and holds it horizontally poking a hole in it with his thumb. The crowd is whistling and yelling in encouragement. The girl he just kissed is right beside the table cheering for him making me roll my eyes.

The swim team is going wild for him too. The boys and Dany are hooting and the girls cheering. Tasha is shooting red dress girl glares and Sophie looks to be sulking.

Oliver lifts the drink to his lips and drinks, his eyes fixated on me.

Think he starts to drink. His Adam's apple bobs as he drinks. Some of the alcohol escapes the drink and runs down his throat and I can't help but watch it trail down his tan skin.

I lean against the wall behind me, needing some stability.

I am impressed and vexed simultaneously. I can't believe he is doing this... and what for? For my entertainment? Because of the challenge? I think it is because he is like me, he doesn't back down.

The crowd roars when he finishes. He grins, a proud look in his eyes when they connect back to mine. He gets to the ground and people instantly make room for him, cheering for him like he is fucking famous.

He runs a hand through his hair then he gracefully does a semi-handstand with onto a keg, and begins to drink while two guys hold his legs up. The party people lose it, hooting and yelling. The cheering is so loud I can't hear myself think. All I can do is watch him, his biceps flex and adam apple bop.

I never knew that it could be so. .. *sexual.*

When he gets back up people are quick to surround him cheering, wanting to touch and capture some of him, especially the girl he kissed before. I scowl.

My tipsy self suddenly feels very sober, because I know what he is going to do now. And while he kissed that girl before that didn't mean anything. But this guy, this coming kiss, that will mean something to him. And for some weird reason, the idea of that doesn't make me feel too great.

I think that it is time for me to leave. I run a hand through my hair trying to find my way out of this stupid party. People keep on banging into me shouldering into me, trying to get into the room where Oliver and the cheering is.

Chapter 7

A loud banging on my door wakes me up. I try to ignore it but it just keeps on getting louder and louder until I can no longer ignore it anymore.

I let out an aggravated sigh, getting out of my warm comfortable bed. I don't bother to chuck a shirt on and just walk to the door briefly running a hand through my bed hair.

I open the door to find Oliver standing outside.

I rub my eyes to see if I am seeing this right, Is Oliver actually outside my dorm room at... I glance down at my watch, at 2:15am.

Oliver is flustered, his hair a mess like he has constantly been running a hand through it all night. His eyes are dilated and from his slight sluggish manner I figure he is tipsy. What surprises me though is his eyes, they are firm and hard; like a man on a mission. He doesn't even look this determined before a swim race.

He eyes me squarely, his eyes briefly running down my naked torso before quickly diverting to my eyes. He swallows heavily, a light redness dusts his checks and I question again if my eyes are working right.

"What the fuck? What are you doing here Oliver?" I grunt, my voice husky from sleep.

I lean against my door frame crossing my arms over my chest. "Here to thank me for my advice? Cause you could have just done that in the morning."

He runs a hand through his messy mop of brown locks. "It's still in process —your advice I mean."

I furrow my brows, confused. "What do you mean? Did you not kiss the poor fella?"

He grimaces, and for a moment I feel a little bad. Maybe that was too far? But then I remember him kissing that girl in the red dress and I am mad again.

I run a hand through my hair, "What do you want then Fowler? More advice, Cause my advice only extended before 1, and I usually don't give out advice. So, count yourself lucky that I was drunk enough and in a generous enough mood to give you some"

His lip twitches. "How courteous of you"

I scoff in response, eyeing him.

There is a pregnant pause and I lick my dry lips. I am slightly nervous and tense with him here. It is one thing to see him at swimming and parties but at my dorm room?

This feels more... *personal* .

His eyes follow the movement of my tongue, but it is so brief I am unsure if I saw it or not. I should really get my eyes checked out.

" *So* ... what are you doing here golden boy? Need some kissing advice too? Did the girl in the red dress complai—"

I am instantly silenced.

In a blink, Oliver is crashing his lips against mine. He does it with so much force that my head thumps into the door frame behind me, startling me.

Holy shit.

He doesn't waste a second, he crowds me more into the door frame pressing me firmly against it with his body. I am in shock for a moment, eyes wide open with Oliver's lips very much attached to mine. His plump wet lips are surprisingly soft. I quickly lose my train of thought, my mind becoming dizzy.

His lips are nice, *really nice.* Too nice to not give into... He sucks in a slightly unsteady breath when my lips respond to his like he wasn't expecting it, but he recovers quickly kissing me harsher and harder than before.

He draws his tongue across my bottom lip and my lips part in shook, he takes advantage of it slipping his tongue between my lips like a starved man and I am his salvation And I couldn't even tell you my fucking name at this point. That's how far gone I am.

My stomach clenches when his tongue meets mine, fighting for dominance. He wins, obviously. His lips dominating mine, this guy really likes to be in control.

He pulls my hair harshly and an uncontrollable groan comes out of my mouth. I hear him mumble fuck against my lips and his raspy voice is hot as fuck.

He distances our lips for some overdue oxygen. Both of us are breathing heavily. He pushes me into my dorm room, a fire in his eyes. I stumble back a little caught off guard by his aggression, not used to him being so forceful.

He kicks the door shut behind him and advances on me, like a predator who has found its prey. He is only a few inches taller than me but he makes me know, standing tall and broad, his tall frame making me feel fucking small.

I can hardly breathe my breath coming out in short pants, my mind starting to process what just happened.

" *W* -what are you...?" I die off.

"This is the last thing, right?" He questions, "Kiss the guy."

"Yeah, but I meant..."

He steps closer.

"What if that was you?"

I laugh, the thought is truly humorous. "It's not. *You can't.* "

He has got to be fucking with me, there is no way that someone like Oliver Fowler could like me. While I hate to say it, this guy is undoubtedly out of the league.

He surveys me for a moment, an unreadable expression on his face and his eyes considerably darker.

"Right, I mean why would I like you?"

I frown opening my mouth to reply, but he steps closer trapping me against the wall, and whatever I was going to say leaves my mind.

"Your rude."

He tangles his fingers in my hair allowing him to manipulate my head however he pleases.

"Mean."

He tugs at my head, forcing me to bare my neck, being kind of... rough.

"And cold"

He moves his head to my ear.

"Good thing I am always warm" He breaths before biting my ear playfully.

I bite my lip to stop myself from making embarrassing sounds.

"Do you want me to warm you up baby?" He murmurs against my neck.

Fuck me.

His fingers are hot on the bare skin of my chest, the warmth of his touch seeping in, I shudder. The body heat he is omitting isn't unwelcome. I grip the bottom of his shirt, trying to stabilise myself.

I tug him closer. He needs to be closer.

A loud bang on my door jolts me. Oliver notices it he doesn't show it; he continues to kiss sloppy kisses along my jaw leaving a trail of sparks and heat behind. I tilt my head giving him more access because truly, who can deny this guy?

The bang comes again, louder this time.

"Ignore it." Oliver grunts biting my neck harshly.

I am panting by this point, my body on fucking fire. And I don't like how well my body responds to his. I push him away—well try to, but the guy doesn't budge.

"Gimme a sec" I mumble, struggling to think properly with him in such close proximity.

He grunts in objection but reluctantly takes a step back.

I adjust my sweat pants and run a hand through my hair before opening the door, and when I do I scowl.

"Andy? What are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here? Where did you go? Not even a text man, I have been blowing up your phone for the last 2 hours! I was worri–" Andy dies off, his eyes wide as he looks at something behind me.

"Oliver?" He says, his voice a pitch higher.

Oliver looks sheepish as he steps closer into the light cast from the hallway. He looks flustered, his cheeks flushed as he runs a hand through his unruly hair.

"Hey, Andy."

Andy is speechless for a second and I can see the cogs turning in his head. I wince in anticipation.

"Hey, Oliver. Good to see you, man... um sorry I interrupted, ah, whatever this is..."

I mentally face palm myself.

Oliver flushes slightly and I am suddenly fascinated by the pink hue painting his cheeks. I didn't think it was even possible to make the guy blush.

"So... ah what's happening here?" Andy presses, and I have never wanted to strangle anyone more than I do right now.

"You sure you two are alright in the same room?" He briefly looks over both of us as if he is looking for injuries.

I run a hand down my face, "Fuck, stop please." I groan.

Andy looks confused when he can't see anything. "Were we having a secret swim team meeting that I didn't know about or something?"

I let out a frustrated puff of breath when Andy waltzes into my room uninvited. I feel very mixed emotions now, my mind muddles.

Oliver looks hesitant, "Ah I better go, I'll see you guys later." He says, smoothly walking out pausing in my doorway. He looks back at me, looking conflicted. But then he shakes his head and leaves.

It takes a for seconds after Oliver is gone for it to clicks for Andy, and when it does he starts to freak out. "Omg, omg, oh my FUCKING GOD! You guys totally have something going on!" He yells to himself, seemingly more proud of himself for figuring out than shocked.

I quickly cover his mouth with my hand, "Keep it down would, it is 2 something in the morning. People are trying to sleep!"

He mumbles an apology under his breath and I cautiously remove my hand.

"Holy shit" He whispers like he still can't believe it. 'How the fuck did you get Oliver's attention?"

I run a hand down my face, "I don't know, I'm really fucking confused right now..."

He snorts, "Same."

I shoot him a glare, "Hey I could so land Oliver if I wanted to!"

He raises an eyebrow, "Yeah I saw, I am just confused as to how..."

I narrow my eyes on him. "I can be pleasant... sometimes"

He chuckles, "Yeah but never too Oliver, you are always such a dick to him. Honestly, man, I'm just kind of surprised, I thought you hated him."

I do hate him.

His lips are just... really soft.

***

For the next two days, I didn't see Oliver. Coach gave us the weekend off from swimming as a break for our bodies before our next swim comp. I was slightly on edge for those two days, unsure what it was going to be like when I went back to swimming.

While the coach's instructions were very clear to rest, I just can't help myself. I had to swim. It is the only way I can clear my head—and my head is a hot mess. Swimming gives me clarity, it burns off any frustration and stress I have, but it doesn't seem to be doing the job today. So I decide to stop swimming and just float. The cold water is nice, it is refreshing, and it is distracting.

But not distracting enough.

I keep on thinking about it, going over what happened over and over in my mind. Oliver was drinking that night, clearly tipsy and quite out of character. And I feel like a piece of shit for letting him kiss me. He probably

regrets it and that thought makes my stomach feel sick. I hope he doesn't think I was taking advantage of him.

I am also real fucking confused as to why I kissed him back. I try not to think too hard about it cause it hurts my brain.

I let myself sink to the bottom of the pool and sit there, engulfed in the cold water. My lungs protesting but I ignore it.

While I am here underwater holding my breath, every other sane student is probably studying. Mid-year exams are nearing is everyone is flat out freaking out about them. I haven't so much as opened a book yet, I have a photogenic memory which comes in handy for tests. So everyone is losing sleep about their nearing exams, I am swimming; trying to rid of the memory of Oliver's stupid soft lips.

Andy is still in shock over what happened, it is all he can talk about and it is driving me insane. It is difficult to forget about it when Andy is talking about it twentyfour-seven.

My lungs start to burn but I don't move. I wish I could just stay underwater and avoid all my problems. It is so much more peaceful under here. But sooner or later I am going to face my problems. Our next comp is out of town, a 4-hour bus drive to go to a motel for our comp. 2 nights away stuck with the swim team. I normally don't mind it too much, but I like my own space, and having to sleep in the same room as them is kind of annoying. The good thing is that all Oliver's mates what to share a room with Oliver so I don't have to sleep in the same room as him.

The bad news is that Oliver holds a lot of power as team captain. Coach relies on him to keep everyone in check. I just hope Oliver is tyrannical with his captain privileges. He is a good captain, everyone loves him, but I hope he doesn't use that power over me.

My lungs can't handle it anymore and I break the surface sucking in sweet air. My mind still a mess, but a little less.

Chapter 8

I am hiding in the bathroom toilet stall like a coward. The bright lights are jarring, making me feel slightly dizzy but it is nothing to the nerves on my stomach.

Oliver makes me mad, he always has. But now he makes me mad and nervous.

And I don't do nervous.

I don't like the icky feeling it gives me, the way my skin crawls and my stomach curls. I much prefer anger. At least I don't feel like I am going to puke when I am angry.

I don't know how to deal with this bulldozer of emotions inside me. Oliver has disrupted my facade creating a rippling effect. Life was much simpler before he attached his lips to mine. Before me made me feel other feelings then anger.

I know I am prolonging the inevitable. I just don't want to face him yet. I have learnt over the years that avoidance is key usually in these situations—kind of difficult though when he is my swim captain. Even more difficult when coach is away and Oliver is running training. Even *even* more difficult when you are going to be in forced proximity over the next few days at our next swim comp.

So unfortunately my avoidance method doesn't work this time. Fuck.

After feeling pathetic and wallowing in self-pity for a bit I finally make it out of the toilet stall and to training.

My nerves are quick to evaporate at training. I forgot how bossy and controlling he can be!

I am usually not such a pain in the arse at training, but there is something in the way Oliver tells me what to do that peeves. me. off. Maybe it is the way he says it like he expects you to follow his command without a doubt. Or maybe it is how bossy he is about it, no sugar coating it. Or maybe it is how easily everyone follows his command, trusting him without a doubt.

The girls think it is hot went he takes control. But for me, no. It grinds my gears.

The guy who drives a fucking Porsche to college telling *me* to swim harder. The kid has probably never had to break a sweat for anything other than swimming in his life. He is given everything on a golden platter. Money and privilege get no respect from me. If he wants my respect he has to earn it, I don't do charity.

I am feeling particularly petty this morning, maybe it is because I spent fucking hour in the bathroom with a zoo in my stomach at the thought of seeing Oliver again and he didn't even glance my way this morning. I feel like an idiot for thinking he would care and even more that *I* cared.

So when Oliver tells me to breathe more, *that does it.* That snaps the last thread of tolerance and obedience I got, tearing it to shreds.

So me being the mature college student 20 year old individual, what do I do?

I hold my breath for the next 2 laps refusing to take a breath of air.

I know he is watching, I can feel his eyes burning holes in my back with every stroke I take. It pushes me harder, knowing he is watching. And it feels fucking great to blatantly go against him. Going against Oliver ignites a adrenaline like no other. It's a feeling I thrive off. He's always so composed and measured, so making him twitch and react is truely an accomplishment. I never know how he will react, what he will do. And every time he surprises me, intrigues me.

When I break the surface at the end of the pool Oliver is standing there looking down at me. His arms are crossed against his chest and he looks

throughly annoyed. I can't help the grin that comes to face.

"You think I'm impressed because you can hold your breath, Lipski?"

"I wouldn't venture to say you're impressed, Captain," I say ripping my goggles off breathing heavily.

He looks up to the roof like he is praying for patience. Like I drive him insane. Like I anger him just as much as he angers me.

He looks back down at me, his lips are pressed together but his eyes are glinting. "Alright then, you think you're so hot shot Goldfish. let's see how good you really are."

He smoothly strips his pants and tops off without hesitation. Then effortlessly drives into the water.

It is an understatement to say I am shocked. Firstly, that he is paying me attention when he has barely glanced at me this whole session only to bark orders and swim criticism. And secondly, that he jumped in the pool.

Some of the team has stopped swimming, watching Oliver jump in with confused and curious expressions. Oliver usually doesn't swim when he coaches, he observes us from outside the pool.

Oliver surfaces from the water shaking the water out of his hair before landing his eyes on me. "Alright Goldfish, show me what you got." He dares, a challenge to his voice.

I am disbelieving for another moment. He wants to see who can hold their breath longer?

There is no way he is going to beat me.
No *fucking* way.

I'm certain about it.

If there is one thing I am good at, it is holding my breath. When I was a kid I used to hold my breath a lot. I used to hold my breath to get attention from my Father. Every rare time we would hang out when I was a kid, I was desperate for his attention. I wanted him to talk to me, to be proud of me, to want to hear about my day. But he was always too busy on his phone and working. So I started holding my breath, to see how long it took for him to notice.

It was a stupid way to rebel against him like that, as if hurting myself would punish him. All it did was make me pass out a few times and allow me to hold my breath for a fucking long time. It's not like he ever noticed. At least I got good lungs out of it.

So no, Oliver Fowler has no chance of beating me.

No chance at all.

"Fowler, you have no chance, it wouldn't be fair game," I say, because it is true. I don't think he realises how good I am at this. How bad he is going to lose.

He cocks his head to the side, sizing me up and I can't help but puff my chest out a little when he does so.

"You know what, let's make a bet out of this. If you win I will let you have the nicest room at our next comp. But if I win..." He pauses thinking. "I get something in return."

By now we have all teams' attention. They have swam over to the side of our lane straining to hear what Oliver is saying. I can't help the grin that comes to my face. I don't even need to ask what he wants because there is no way he will win. Not this time.

Game on golden boy.

***

Are eyes are connected in a hard stare both of us too stubborn to break. But I'm seriously considering it because his dark gaze is making my stomach flip.

We are both sitting cross-legged holding onto a water weight facing each other. All I hear is silence and all I see is him.

He looks surprisingly comfortable and relaxed. Composed as always, even when deprived of oxygen for over a minute.

He wants to win, I can see it. A fire is burning in his eyes, and I'm afraid I have been caught in the cross fire.

Golden boy comes from a rich family. A loving caring family. He has never had to work at anything like me. He didn't have to work his arse off to buy his first car. He doesn't have to try hard at swimming he is just naturally good with his long limbs. He didn't have to hold his breath to try and get his Fathers attention.

And that is why I am going to win.

The light breaking through the surface flickers. I look up to see figments of a persons fractured silhouette. Someone is looking down into the water. Someone awfully familiar, like an itch at the back of my brain.

My eyes flick back to Oliver whose eyes are already on me he is unaware of the person watching us.

I try not to let it distract me too much because nothing is going to stop me from the sweet victory of beating Oliver. I am going to win this round if it takes every breath in me— *literally* .

Oliver is fidgeting a little and I can tell he is struggling. I raise an eyebrow at him to which he ignores. To be honest I am surprised he has lasted this

long. I didn't think he would. And from the look of determination on his face I worried that he is going to push himself too far.

The person above the surface is still there. They wave and my eyes widen when recognition hit. I am so shocked I suck in a sharp breath. Except, there is no air around me—only water.

My lungs protest and I quickly make my way to the surface to splutter the water I inhaled.

Game most defiantly not on. Nah fuck this, I forfeit. The bet is long forgotten as cough out the water. After I have recovered I look at the person who is the cause of my lost breath.

This can't be right, my Father didn't even come to my swim comp that was on my birthday, why would he come to a training now? Anxiety builds in my muscles making them twitch.

"Dad?" I says hesitantly. "Ah, what are you doing here?"

He grins his charming smile. "Hey kiddo, I thought I'd pop by and grab a meal with you."

For the third time this day I am shocked. I am distantly aware of Oliver breaking the waters surface but mainly focused on the man in front of me. The man I haven't seen in what feels like forever.

Oliver let's me leave training early to grab some food with my Dad. The whole time he was talking about himself and his money and job while I played with the chips on my plate. I lost my appetite pretty soon, was a shame too because the food looked fucking good.

For the first time ever I wasn't holding onto every word of his like gospel. I wasn't competing for his attention or wanting him to care about me. For the first time I was bored. It felt like I was truely seeing him for who he truely is. Seeing how self-centred he is.

I tried to put a fake smile on and pretend that I was happy to see him. Happy to hear him talk more about himself. Good thing he doesn't know me well, my acting skills aren't the best.

Funny thing was that it wasn't my Dads bullshit he was spewing or lack of interest in me that was occupying my mind. But it was the bet Oliver and I had made.

The bet I lost.

And suddenly I wish I asked him what he wanted from me before I agreed.

Chapter 9

I *really* needed this race.

This distraction.

And I am pissed off that I didn't get it.

I have been agitated about spending the next couple of days stuck with the swim team, but it was alright because I was going to be racing. I was going to be swimming.

That is why this competition has been good. It is an important comp, our team needs points to keep our reputation up and in the running for the overall points. It's also important for me to do well so I can keep my scholarship.

And now that has all been jeopardised.

The nervous and the anticipation for the race were meant to distract me from my *really* shit week. But it doesn't seem like it is going to anymore.

I don't have many friends, most people can't deal with my fluctuating moods. But surprisingly I do have a few.

I have one less now. My oldest friend died a couple days ago. He got in with the wrong crowd and overdosed. When I found out the news I was in denial, there is *no way* that Henry would be that stupid to do that. But then I talked to his Mum and it quickly became real.

I haven't allowed myself to have time to think about it, with the swim comp coming up it was easy to distract myself. But now, now I am sitting here with all these horrible thoughts invading my mind and I can't swim myself out of this one. Instead, I am forced to sit with him in my mind. Forced to come to the cold hard reality of it. I'd rather stay in dreamland.

I bang my head repeatedly on the wall behind me in frustration.

"Would you quit it!" Snaps Quinn from across the room. She sends me a nasty glare. "Just because I am stuck in this room with you doesn't mean I am going to tolerate you."

I scoff, "This is your fault, *remember* . If you didn't go all psycho ex on me we wouldn't be here." I snare, sick of her shit.

Quinn Bell is Oliver's ex-girlfriend. She is a swimmer at our rival college. Queen bee of her college and is hella quick in the water. I remember the massive drama circulating when her and Oliver broke up. It seems she's still not over it.

I was lucky enough to run into her before my race, note the sarcasm.

I didn't even know she knew I existed until she shoved me into this stupid classroom acting like a jealous bitch about Oliver. Went on about how I needed to stay away from him. Then she tried to do a graceful exit except the door was locked.

Would have been real fucking funny— *if I wasn't the one stuck in it with her.*

Fucking awesome.

"I'm just looking out for Oliver. He's too good for you. You don't know him like I do."

I rub my temple feeling a killer headache coming. "I don't know what you're talking about. I just wanted to fucking swim."

I just want to forget.

That makes her press her lips together. Good, I need some peace and quiet. My mind is already loud enough.

"I'm not going to apologise." She states, her chin held high.

I sigh deeply, not really giving a shit. "I know."

"If you just left Oliver alone we wouldn't be in this situation."

I lift my head giving her a confused look. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

She narrows her eyes on me. "Oliver already has enough shit to deal with, he doesn't need you playing with him."

I arch an eyebrow. "Playing with him?"

She nods.

I laugh, it's a bitter laugh. "Me? Feels more like he's playing with me."

"I saw him kissing that girl at the party and watching you. I dated him for 2 years! 2 fucking years. And he has never looked at me like he looks at you. You don't even know how fucking lucky you are." she laughs darkly.

I chuckle, but it's humourless. "Wow, still not over the breakup, huh? You're being paranoid, Quinn. Move on."

A fire ignited in her eyes. "You prick!" she yells diving toward me.

I scramble away dodging her hand as she swipes at me but she manages to get scratch my cheek with the tip of her nails. Holy shit.

I grab hold of her wrists restraining her."What the fuck is your problem!?" I grunt.

" *You* . Oliver is too good for you!" She yells, struggling in my grip.

"I KNOW!" I exclaim. "I fucking know, *okay* . So chill out."

She relaxes slightly when she sees it in my eyes. For a moment we share a mutual understating.

When I think she isn't going to attack me I hesitantly let her go. She storms back to the opposite side of the room sitting down and drawing her knees to her chest. She's obviously a bit delusional and *totally* nuts, but I can't help but feel a bit bad for her. She has it bad for Oliver.

Why is everything always about him? I'm sick of hearing his fucking name. I lean my head back against the wall staring at the roof. He's going to kill me for missing this race. He is going to be furious. Coach is going to give me the disappointed Father look which I can't stand. I respect Coach a lot, and it tears me apart at the thought of letting him down.

Fuck.

I bury my head in my hands. When did life get so heavy? Ever since Henry died it feels like I am carrying this heavy weight on my shoulder everywhere I go. It's exhausting. I am so tired. I just can't seem to wrap my head around the fact I am never going to see him again. Never going to see him laugh, smile, or talk shit again.

And that sucks so much.

"I'm sorry." She says so quietly I barely hear it.

"Yeah, well you should be. That race has been the only thing keeping me sane all week." I grunt, dragging a hand down my tired face.

"Oliver's just–"

" *Don't* ." I interrupt. "Don't say his name again, I am fucking sick of hearing his name everywhere I go."

Quinn looks confused now, her facial features softening slightly. "You have no idea, do you?"

I furrow my brows. "No idea about what?"

She laughs shaking her head in disbelief. "That motherfucker, you really have no clue."

Now I was getting frustrated. "Yes, we have established that. Care to enlighten me?"

Before she can reply the door opens and Quinn and I are jumping to our feet. Ryan from my swim team opens the door, a relieved look on his face when he spots me.

"You are in so much shit Beau" He shakes his head.

I ignore him as I scramble out of the room. It took them too long to find us. I don't know how much longer I can be trapped in a room with that girl.

Honestly, I don't think this day can get any worse.

I halt my steps when I see Oliver. —Nah, things can get worse.

Oliver looks distressed and It surprises me. I am not used to him like that. The guy is never stressed, not even in the most intense swim competitions when he has the pressure as reigning winner to win again. He barely breaks a sweat in those make-or-break situations. But now, he looks thoroughly frustrated now.

He is wet like he just raced and has just gotten out of the pool. Water glistened against his naked tan torso. His sweatpants are low on his hips and his v-line peaking out. I swallow.

When he sees me relief flashes through his eyes and he visibly relaxes. Quinn walks out behind me drawing his eye. He wears a puzzled expression at the sight of her but it quickly turns into annoyance.

He looks... displeased.

I am unsure if I see jealously spark in his eyes, I wonder who it is for.

He marches over to me with a pissed-off look on his face. "Where the fuck have you been Lipski."

I open my mouth but nothing comes out. I open and close my mouth like a fucking fish. Real smooth Beau. *Real fucking smooth.*

"Oliver" Quinn says walking up to him. She smiles sweetly like she didn't just threaten me and make me miss my damn race.

Oliver barely spares her a glance his eyes trained on me, waiting for my response. I shift nervously on my feet. "I got locked in the classroom."

He chuckles, but it's humourless. He looks lethal. "You were locked in a classroom with my ex-girlfriend?"

I grimace. "Yes."

He frowns, visibly annoyed. He is silent for a while, and each second feels like an hour. "Your next race is next." He says, his tone clipped.

I nod my head avoiding his eyes but I don't miss his eyes training on my cheek. I watch him struggle to keep his composure, a muscle in his jaw flexing.

He turns his sharp gaze to Quinn. "What the fuck did you do Quinn." He leers, his voice dripping with anger.

Rolling her eyes she looks down at her nails. "Calm down Oliver, I barely touched your boy. We just had a bit of a... *misunderstanding* ."

I scoff in response.

He clenched and unclenches his fist visibly trying to calm himself. He nods his head towards the pool, "Go to your race Beau." He doesn't ask, it's a command. For once I comply without a fight keen to get out of there.

I don't miss how Oliver grabs Quinn's arm holding her back though. I try not to let it bother me, but a part of me wants to know what they are talking about. A part of me hates how she looks at him. But the bigger part of me is relieved that I can finally race.

***

Everything was off.

My breathing was off. My dive was off. My pacing was off. Even my synchronised motion was off.

Instead of racing help make me forget I was just fucking up. If anyone noticed I was off they didn't say anything. Oliver was watching me more closely, I could feel his gaze on me. His expression didn't give much away but it kind of looked like he was confused, like I was a fascinating puzzle he couldn't quite get.

It isn't until my last race that day that things change. The race where I am in the same heat as Oliver.

And suddenly it was *so* on.

My drive to beat Oliver overrides and distracts me from my shit performance and wandering mind.

Oliver is in the lane beside me. Every other contestant is stretching their muscles and jumping on their toes preparing themselves for the race. But not Oliver and I. Instead we are sizing each other up, well I am sizing him up. His eyes are slightly glazed off, his head somewhere else as he looks at me.

The bell rings indicating for us to set up.

"So, about that bet," Oliver says as we step up onto the diving board. I give him a side glance.

"I think I have decided what I want as my reward."

And the gun goes off.

Chapter 10

I scramble off the diving board a few second after everyone else.

Fuck.

This seems to be a regular occurrence, I always seem to be a step behind Oliver. Always scrambling behind him in a haste. Always the one reacting to the moves *he* makes. It sucks.

Once I am in the water I try to blank my mind and focus on the race, on my movement. Usually, when I am racing all I think about Is winning. About the glory and the gold. But this time is different. Winning is not the prime thought on my mind this time.

I try not to think about it about what is really on my mind.

What bet?

Oliver who?

For the whole race, my mind is a mess. Just when my body was starting to work and my motion was starting to be more synchronised, my mind would fuck me up. It was overthinking too much.

Thankfully race finishes quickly enough. I didn't come last, but I didn't come first either. It is obvious who won the race. I know because he was a good few feet in front of everyone. I also know because every is currently sending him envious and impressed glances.

It's good for our team. I should be happy that Oliver has scored our team valuable points.

But I'm fucked off because that was *not cool.*

Who does that kind of shit? Who throws a bomb like that at someone before a race? LITERAL SECONDS before the race. Some people need to focus before diving. Some people need to actually be looking at the water before they dive.

I don't appreciate these mind games. He doesn't need mind games to win and he knows that. What is he playing at? What is he trying to achieve? Because last I checked the better I do—the better the team places.

My fingers grip the side of the pool as I try to regain my breath along with all the other swimmers. The other swimmers are all panting at the end of their lanes, looking at Oliver with distant envy. With stars in their eyes. I am starting to become familiar with the effect Oliver has on people. The way people are looking at him like they are right now.

But Oliver is looking at me.

He's looking at me and I can't look at him. My body is buzzing with adrenaline and twitchy,but my mind is tired. My bed has never been more wanted than now. A bonus would be I would be far away from *him* .

I mean, who knows I could have won? This could have been the time I finally bet him. But he distracted me, he made me fuck up. But my heart isn't in it today to be as pissed as I would normally be.

Out of my peripheral vision, I see him swim closer. He is breathing heavily, his lip curled and eyes glinting. He leans against the swimming lane divider between us, too close for comfort. His chest is heaving up and down as he tries to find his breath. Wet curls hang in his eyes and his jaw solid as stone. He doesn't say anything, just watches me. Waiting.

His breathing is harsh puffs of air, his lips parted slightly and eyes not wavering from me. I start fidgety under his gaze. My tired body is restless.

"What?" I snap, turning my head to finally look him in the eye. "Want congratulation? A compliment?"

His grin grows and he cocks his head to the side. "Yeah, I'd like that. Can I get that?"

I scoff, "Not from me, but don't worry I'm sure you will get plenty from everyone else." My voice dripping with anger.

He leans closer, his dark wet hair wet pushed back out of his face. Droplets of water clinging to his bronze skin and ridges of his chest become more defines as he moves closers. He looks like the devil. A delicious edible devil.

I look lower. He has a nice neck. He has a nice Adam apple attached to that neck too. I never knew necks could be so... *attractive* . And now I'm looking at his neck like a weirdo. I quickly divert my gaze, cheeks flushing.

He says nothing and just grins like an idiot. A happy idiot.

"Are you going to keep on smiling like that at me? Cause you look stupid." I say, shrugging unapologetically.

His lip twitches. My eyes are instantly drawn lower down his face. Pink. Soft. Fuckkk

"You gonna make me?" He arches a playful eyebrow.

My eyes raise to his in shock. Then they furrow.

"Oi, next race is about to happen boys!" One of the officials calls out to us. It is only then that I realise we are the only two swimmers still in the pool.

I get out of the pool ignoring Oliver's eyes burning holes into me. That was my last race for the day, and I fucked up nearly every race today. I don't think I have ever swum so badly at a competition in my *life* . And I don't think I have cared so little for the results in my life.

There's something wrong with me. I was mad—I *am* mad, I'm always mad (probably distantly related to the Hulk or something). But this time my anger Isn't directed towards my performance, towards my massive swimming disappointment. And that freaks me out.

I don't care. I don't care that I fucked up my races. I'm trying to care, but something that once seemed so valuable and wanted isn't as great anymore. I just feel empty. I wish I could talk to Henry, he would say something stupid that would make me laugh or get annoyed. That thought leaves a sinking feeling In my stomach.

I want my old self back. The one that got determined when he lost a race. That got mad when Oliver bet him. The one that *cared* . The one that doesn't feel like this empty shell of a person. That doesn't feel so... numb.

So I try to do just that. I support the rest of the team's races. I chat with Andy and try to be pissed about my races (because that is in character of me). I rebel against Oliver, whether it be from ignoring his simple commands or biting back with snarky comments. But it doesn't work. I just feel more tired. More numb.

I thought I hid it well. I thought no one would notice— that no one would care. But it seems Oliver instantly picked up on my bad mood. He sees right through me. Instead of getting mad, putting me in my pace, or even ignoring me, he does something unexpected. He grabs my arm and pulls me aside from everyone.

"Are you okay?" He asks brows furrowed and voice low and measure. Concern in his eyes.

I near god break down right in front of him. Something about that question just makes you realise how *not* okay everything is. I nearly goddamn cry like a fucking kid in front of him, tempted to sob into his shoulder and have him wrap his arms around me. To comfort me as I cry about Henry and how shit the world is. How unfair life is, to take someone so good away, so undeserving.

So I look away from his face before I crumble. Instead, I focus on a tree in the background. I keep a neutral expression on the outside, but inside I'm cracking. The walls made of sarcasm, anger, and meanness nearly crumble.

"Look, whatever is going on, whatever is pissing you off, I can help make it better." He says, his voice so gentle I have to check that he is the one saying

it.

I open my mouth but don't have a chance to say anything.

"The bus is here!" One of the team members calls out.

I shake my head trying to rid the emotions out of me. I take that opportunity to walk past him and into the bus. I plug my earphones and blast music loud. Trying to drown out the thoughts in my head with music.

I can't believe I nearly talked to Oliver about it. To *him* ... of people. God, I really must be losing it.

***

Back at the hotel and Coach is making us study before bed. We have tests coming up in a few weeks and he is strict about us getting good grades.

Tests are the last thing on my mind at the moment. I can't seem to think straight. My mind can't even read a goddamn sentence without my thoughts drifting. I grit my teeth, wishing I could be anywhere but here. I'm not in the best mindset to study right now—let alone to be around people. The company I am craving is a bottle of gin. That's company I would appreciate.

"You're going to fail your exams Beau if you don't study," Ryan says, eyeing me and my unopened book beside me.

Unlike me, everyone else has books and pens sprawled around them on the ground all working like good students. Yeah, *fuck that* .

I roll my eyes and Andy shoots me a side glance. We share an amused smirk.

Ryan looks between us with a confused expression. "What?"

Andy shakes his head smiling, "Beau doesn't need to study, Ryan. He is going to ace the test, he *always* does. I bet my money on Beau getting a

better mark than you. He can answer all the questions in front of you without even opening the workbook."

I shoot Andy an annoyed look, I have better things to do with my time than show up arseholes like Ryan.

"Beau beat Ryan? No way. Ryan is a nerd, when he's not swimming he is in the library studying" Ben backs up.

I sigh leaning my head back against the wall closing my eyes. I really don't have the energy to deal with these people. Or just people in general.

"Alright, let's put him to the test then" Ryan smirks.

My eyes open and I give him an unimpressed look. "Why? Who cares?" I grunt.

"You scared I'm going to beat you, Lipski?" Ryan taunts.

"Beat me?" I laugh. "I'm more concerned I'm going to squash your pride and ego so small that even a bug has more," I say, closing my eyes again and resting my head back against the wall. Maybe that was harsh, but I'm not in the best of moods. I'm in a 'don't mess with me' mood. But it seems Ryan is getting the memo.

"That s a lot of talk Lipski, can you *actually* perform though? I mean, if it was anything like your races today... I would be worried." He leers.

My eyes flash open.

"Like you can perform, *right?* Because last I heard from your girlfriend you weren't too good in that department either..."

People hoot and whistle at the burn. The group is fully invested in the heating argument now. Watching back and forth between Ryan and me like we are their entrainment. Ryan is twitching in anger, an ugly expression twisting up his face. I can practically see the steam coming from his ears. "You're a dick" He snares.

"The biggest" I agree.

Oliver enters and the energy in the room changes. Everyone straightens their backs and eyes draw to him. I feel a charged energy in the room.

Oliver looks around the room, noticing tension and amusement. "What did I miss?"

"Oh, just Beau telling us how big his dick is," Sophie says, picking at her nails.

Oliver's eyes widen to the size of saucers, his mouth parting in shock."W- *w* hat" He stutters.

The room is silent for a second before everyone bursts out laughing. I roll my eyes my face giving away nothing, but can't help when my lip twitches a little.

"Okay stop talking about his..." He coughs, looking uncomfortable. "Get back to it, alright." He says, opening up his book. I swear his cheeks are a little redder and that makes the corner of my lip tug further.

***

Footsteps are behind me but I don't pay them any attention.

"Beau." A deep voice calls and I instantly know who it is. The last person I want to be around right now.

"Beau, I'm talking to you!" He calls out again.

I ignore him, continuing down the hallway into my room. He follows me in.

I pace the room clenching and unclenching my fists. So much anger and sadness bottled in me. It's too much. An article about Henry was released. I saw it when I was playing around on my phone and it brought all my feelings rushing back to me. I couldn't stand being in the room with everyone anymore so I left. But Oliver followed me out it seems.

I spin around to face him. "Fuck off Fowler, now's not a good time," I growl.

He runs a frustrated hand through his hair. "Look, I don't know what I did to piss you off? But I have been wracking my brain trying to figure it out, but I'm *lost* . So you're going to have to enlighten me, Beau, because it's starting to piss me off."

I stop my pacing and abruptly face him. Glaring up at him.

Old me. Old me would be mad about the race. I decided to give it to him straight. The way old me would. "I lost that race because of you."

He arches an amused and angry eyebrow.

"I could have won, but *you* ... You fucking distracted me! And it fucked me up for the rest of the race." I growl, shoving his chest.

He barely steps back from the force of my push. But I don't stop there. I get in his face, exaggerating my height to its fullest yet it still doesn't seem to have anything on him.

"You made me lose." I say spitefully. And it feels good to let my anger out on him.

"For fucks sake Beau, you're mad at me because I ' *distracted'* you?"

"Yes," I breath.

He shakes his head. "I think you're bipolar," he grumbles under his breath so quietly I don't think I was supposed to hear it.

But I heard it. Oh, I fucking heard it.

My next actions may have not been the most... *mature* .

"Fuck you!" I growl, shoving his chest so hard he stumbles back into the back of the bed. Caught off guard he grabs my shirt pulling me down with him as he falls onto the bed.

My body is instantly aware of his under mine. He faces so close to my own, his body hard and firm under mine. I want to punch him so hard. I want to bite his lip harshly and tug his hair until he groans — *wait...* what?

Being so close to him is messing with my mind. I try to get off of him but he grabs my collar pulling me right back. I use my arms supporting me to try keep as much distance as he allows with his firm grip on my collar.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Beau, I just think maybe that explains your fluctuating moods," he says calmly, watching for my reaction.

"I'm not bipolar" I grunt. "You fucked me off, you distracted me," I say, trying to convince myself in the process.

He hums, biting his lower lip. "Right, I apologise. I didn't realise I was such a *distraction* to you." He hums, tugging my collar so our faces are closer. I hesitate for a minute at our proximity, but I'm too determined to not back down that I don't move back.

"Yeah," I grumble. "So quit it." I add, glad he is finally understanding.

"Should I wear more clothing? Would that be less of a distraction to you?"

"W- *w* hat..? *N* -no, I meant that—"

"Because I can, to not distract you..."

"I- *I* didn't mean th—"

"I can also avoid touching you, if that helps?" He interrupts again, a teasing tone to his voice.

My face burns.

I am going to kill this guy.

"I meant. the race. At the start of the *race* ." I manage to get out of my tight jaw. I try to get off him again but he tugs me back down again. I am starting to get frustrated with him.

" *Oh* ," he nods as if remembering. "You mean when I told you decided what I wanted as my prize?" He says cocking his head to the side, eyes sparkling.

"Yes," I grit out.

"Were you distracted by thinking about what I wanted as my prize?"

I don't respond, he knows the answer. His grin lengthens.

"Would you like to know what I want as my prize, Beau?"

I am clenching my jaw so tight that my muscles are hurting. "What do you want?" I grunt lowly, becoming increasingly aware of the space between us —or more accurately the space not between us.

He grins a moment longer like he enjoys watching me like this. I can tell he enjoys having something over me.

"A double date." He says simply.

"...w- *w* hat?" I say shocked.

"I have a girl I might go going on a date with, and her friend needs a date... I thought I could help you out in the process too." He says simply.

I am nonplussed. Thrown off guard. I didn't think he would want me to go on a double date with him...

He speaks again. "I know you're not the *best* kisser, so I thought she could help you out, teach you a few things..."

It takes a second for his words to kick in. And when it does I'm really to strangle they guy.

"Bad kisser?! I'm *not* a bad kisser!" I defend, my anger barely contained.

He hums. "Really? Cause last time we kissed after the party, you were... *well...* " He shrugs under me, his eyes glinting.

"You're lying." I say in disbelief, eyes searching his face for indications he's lying. "I'm an amazing kisser. The *best* ."

"I don't know about that..." He chuckles lazily, looking amused as his eyes drift lower down my face.

My eye twitches. That's it, I am going to prison for murdering this guy.
"I. am good. Unbelievably , mind blowingly talented *actually* ." I spit.

His eyes flick back to me. They are darker. Challenging. *Exited?*

"Prove it." He dares, his voice almost hoarse.

"what?"

"If you're not a bad kisser then. prove. it." He declares.

"I- *I* can't do it right now..."

He releases my collar and lifts himself onto his elbows, attempted to get up.
"That's what I thought." He sighs, "it's alright Beau, I've heard your date is a good kisser, maybe she can—"

I slam my lips onto his so hard his head bounces back on the bed.

I'll show him.

***

Chapter 11

"I'll show him."

***

The kiss isn't gentle. It's clashing of teeth and bruising of lips. It's hard and it's *rough* .

I'm punishing his lips for all the shit he puts me through. All the feelings he makes me feel.

And the punishment is good. *So good* .

It's bittersweet; a mixture of pain and pleasure. A consuming desire.

He is sexy as fuck. His messy dark hair is falling across his forehead. His breathing laboured. His plumb red lips so biteable, so much so that I have a strong desire to bite his bottom lip. Hard. And then pull his hair and hear him grunt, or moan. Fuck.

I am supposed to be showing him talented my lips are. Drag It out slowly and make it sensual. Impress. But it's not going down like that. It is more uncontrolled than that.

He doesn't seem to mind.

Not at all.

His fingers weave between my curls, tugging me closer. I can't but moan into his mouth. He mumbles fuck under his breath and tugs my hair again, slightly harder this time.

His tongue runs along my bottom lip. I am panting, deprived of oxygen. He doesn't stop there, he leaves open-mouth kisses across my jaw and to my ear. I shiver as he bites my ear lobe.

"I'm good, right?" I say between heavy breaths, my lips tingling and heart beating erratically.

"Fucking horrible," he breathed, intertwining his fingers in my hair and pulling me back down to his lips.

He moans when our tongues touch, and fuck if that wasn't the hottest sound. His tongue flights with mine—battling for control. Even under me, it feels like he's in control. He tugs my bottom lip into his mouth, almost possessively.

"Is that," I breathe heavily, "good enough?"

I want him to say it. To admit that he likes it.

"I think I need more convincing." He pulls my head back down for a second time.

He rolls us in a smooth motion that I am left wide-eyed and under him.

Holy shit.

kisses along my collarbone. He bites the skin and I hiss. But it quickly turns into a sigh when he soothes it over with his tongue. He continues his bitter-sweet torcher along my collarbone and neck.

He sits up tugging at my shirt. "This. off. now"

His breathing becomes harsher when I pull my shirt over my head. His eyes drink me in. He discards his one smooth motion and I gulp. He continues to bite and suck the skin down my neck and to my chest.

"Fuck.." I pant. "Don't leave a mark," I say between breaths, my neck bared to him.

At that moment he playfully bites my skin and l yelp in surprise.

He sucks the skin below my collarbone.

"Oliver" I grunt in warning as he bites my neck. I shiver as he licks ups the side of my neck.

"Why not?" He grunts.

"Because people will see"

"And...?"

He lowers his hips to mine, grinding against me. I instantly lose all train of thought and moan. He continues to kiss down my chest and I become a prisoner to his touch.

***

I wash my face, *again.* Then brace my hands on the sink. Slow deep breaths in and out.

In and out.

In and out.

My hands tighten around the basin so much that my knuckles turn white. Dark shadows visible under my eyes, but I doubt people will notice that— not when I have love bites littering my neck and chest...

Pink bruises decorating my neck, easily seen and drawing of attention.

Fuck me.

Standing in the mirror I want to jump into a hole and never come out. Staring at my naked— hickey-covered chest. Starting at my *love bites.*

I have swim races today... The last day of swimming. The *finals* . The most important day!

Fuckkk.

Thankfully we were interrupted before it got too far. Thankfully the team are louder fuckers and sound like a small stampede walking down the hallway. Thankfully I managed to scramble away just before my roommates came in.

Who knows the further damage he would have done if he kept at it...

I want to kill him. I swear when I see the guy I will make him pay for this.

God no one is going to take me seriously with this shit all over me! I can't even put makeup over it to cover it up because the water will surely wash it away.

It's okay, I can get through this.

I have come to the decision that I am just going to ignore it... Pretend I don't look like Jackson pollock's new artwork and just carry on with my day. I only have two races today. Then can wear a shirt and no one will remember.

Who knows, maybe I act like it's not there people won't notice?

I mean, it's only a few bruises...

Everyone notices.

From the moment I step outside the bathroom, I feel it. People staring. Some snicker while others blush, some even whistle. I grit my teeth and continue to walk past the other team to where my team is.

It's like the hickey walk of shame.

The hickey walk of shame at a national swim competition...

Awesome .

This is a weird experience, I have never had anyone give me hickeys before —let alone *let* anyone give me hickeys.

Last night... I wasn't doing much thinking, (At least not with my head).

The rest of the team is all waiting together, the coach is briefing us before we warm up as a team. I am late. Everyone else is already there listening intently to the coach and I am late. Late from freaking out in the bathroom over my marks.

This day just keeps on fucking getting better.

I try to subtly stand in the back.

"I see Beau has finally decided to show up," Coach says, arching an eyebrow at me.

Shit.

That's when everyone looks at me. Everyone takes me in with wide eyes as I make my way over to them. Even Coach looks surprised when he notices.

I scowl. It's embarrassing.

Really fucking embarrassing.

Oliver bites his lip, unsuccessfully suppressing his smile.

I think am going to murder the guy. After his races *though* , so he can win them and get our team some good points, then I'll murder him.

"Seems like Lipski had a busy night," Tasha mumbles under her breath earning some laughter from the group.

I try to act unbothered, but my cheeks are burning and probably contesting the red of the multiple love bites littered across me.

"Shut up Tash." Oliver rolls his eyes, though he doesn't look too annoyed. Oliver can't seem to keep his stupid smile off of his face.

"Today is our last day of races. I need your head in the game." Coach gives me a stern look, drawing the team's attention back to him thankfully. "No

fraternising with the competition, *alright* ."

If only he knew these hickeys didn't come from the competition... but his dearly adored captain.

"Yes sir, I'll follow the captain's lead," I nod, voice composed enough he can't tell the sarcasm in it.

Olive bites his lip smiling as he looks away.

Coach looks confused for a second before nodding curtly. " *Good* , Oliver's a good role. Should be one to all of you." He says now addressing the rest of the team.

Yeah, a real good fucking role model you got their coach.

***

"Damn, you had a number done on you," Andy says, taking in my chest and neck.

I rub my neck awkwardly and then wince when I touch the tender skin. "I look like an idiot."

"A marked idiot. Poor Sophie who has had a crush on you for like *forever* looks like a kicked puppy."

I scoff, "She doesn't have a crush on me."

Andy scoffs, "Yes, she does. You're just oblivious to like.. everything."

I shoot him a dry look as I sit on the wooden bend, but he doesn't notice because he's too busy tugging his shirt on. He looks out of it, confused maybe?

We are in the changing rooms. Andy has finished his one race for today and I have one more to go. I should be with the rest of the team cheering on

whoever is racing now but as soon as Andy got out of the pool I could tell something was off with him.

"You did good today," I say, wondering if he's upset that he didn't place in his race this morning.

He shakes his head shoving his shit into his bag. "No, I didn't. Even on you're bad day you still qualify for finals. I didn't even get top 3."

My brows furrow. "Andy, you're against some of the best swimmers in the country, don't be so rough on yourself."

He sighs dropping his stuff to face me. "I have to tell you something."

"Okay...?" I say nervously.

"I know about Henry."

My throat feels dry and suddenly I want to be anywhere but here.

"I want you to know I am here for you, Beau. Truly, if you need anything, anyone to talk to, I'm always here for you."

I nod, avoiding his gaze, my body tense.

"I also think you deserve to know, that... Josh, is here. He's racing here today."

I'm not a violent person by nature. I mean yeah, I got bark (a lot of it). But I don't got bite. I don't *usually* bite.

I'm grumpy, rude, and mean—but I'm *not* violent.

But seems I'm all types of wound up recently; with everything that happened to Henry, I'm tense. I'm jittery and I'm all bite apparently.

But only towards him. Towards *Josh* .

I don't know too much about him, but I do know the moment I met him I didn't like him. I had a bad gut feeling about him, but I'm usually wrong about those things so I ignored it.

Henry looked up to him, he used to include him in group catches ups and parties. Josh is a dick, always hitting on uninterested girls and objectifying people. He is also the one who got Henry into drugs. The one who encouraged him to take the drugs *that night* .

He doesn't recognise me at first, he doesn't notice me. He is stretching, seconds from going to the diving board to race. But I beat him to it. He is focused. Too focused on the race to notice me storming up to him. Too focused on the person he is talking to to see my clenched fists and locked jaw.

He looks fine... He looks *good* . He looks okay. He looks happy. He is alright. He is laughing.

I have never wanted to inflict pain on someone as much as I do now. He laughs again and it only adds fuel to the fire. A whole *fucking* lot of fuel.

He doesn't have bags under his eyes, he is laughing along with his friend. He is fucking smiling.

Smiling .

He doesn't deserve to smile. I am blinded with rage, no logical thought within a 10-meter radius of me.

He doesn't get to smile when Henry can't, and with that thought in mind, I send my fist flying into his face. "You son of a bitch!" I spit as my fist connects with his cheek.

Josh recoils back from the punch, it takes a second for him to recognise me. His face twists into an ugly expression of anger and shock.

Everything from then on is a blur. A Messy blur of fists flying and bodies rolling around on the ground. All I see is red. All I feel is anger. All I want

is to hurt him. He doesn't get to smile, not when Henry can't. He doesn't get to be okay. Get to be good. Get to fucking laugh—not this soon.

People are yelling and shouting. People gasping and crying out in shock as a crowd forms. Everyone is too scared to get involved between two muscular swim built athletes. It is all drowned out to me, my only focus is punching him, hurting him.

He lands a few got punches which would normally make me back off because Josh is the bigger guy. He is the guy who has been in a lot of fights and knows a few good tricks. The guy who has got one *hell* of a punch.

But anger is a great pain killer and I am fucking high on it.

"Come, Josh!" I yell as I barely dodge his punch to my face. "You going to convince me to take drugs next? *Huh?* Bet you're even doped up right now."

"Go fuck yourself, Beau! It was his choice!"

I laugh, it's a bitter humourless laugh. "You a piece of shit Josh, ever convince someone to take that much drugs again and I will fuck you up."

He snarls tackling me to the ground. We roll around on the ground trying to get the upper hand.

Strong arms wrap around my waist half lifting me off my feet and pulling me away from Josh.

"Woah, calm down," Oliver's voice soothes in my ear.

I am anything but calm. I'm high on anger. I want justice. I want Henry back, but that can't happen so this is the next best thing.

I grunt struggling to get out of his grip to punch the guy again, but Oliver's grip doesn't budge. He effectively pulls me away from him as Josh touches his split lip looking at me with anger and narrowed eyes, still sitting on the ground.

Oliver drags me into the nearest bathroom but I am too high on anger to notice much. I do notice how he locks the door behind him and guides me to the basin.

Now after the adrenaline from the fight kicked down I feel embarrassed. I adjust the collar of my shirt feeling my face heat up. I am low, all that adrenaline run dry and I suddenly feel tired.

I just want this day to be over already. I want these emotions inside me to be over.

Olivers stands up tall, his few inches on me feeling like miles on me. He doesn't say anything as he grabs some paper towels and wets them before gently dabbing the cut along my cheek. I lean heavily against the sink as he does so, avoiding his eyes.

He doesn't say anything but I can tell he is mad. Big mad.

***

Chapter 12

Author Note: I think it's about time I update...

Just wanted to say a massive thank you to all who supported me on the last chapter! Appreciate you all so much ❤ . Also a shout-out to the original people that supported this story, I wouldn't be here without you. Anyway, enjoy the story...

***

Oliver is mad. Eye twitching— hands clenched—body tense, *type of mad* .

He doesn't say anything for the first few minutes, he checks my hand and intently scans me for any other injuries. He's unusually quiet while he does so, his lips pressed into a firm thin line. When he comes to the conclusion I'm alright, he takes an angry step back.

He lets out a puff of air, rakes a hand through his hair, narrows his eyes.

"You, a so *fucking* immature, Beau," he grits, then louder, " *so* IMMATURE!"

I stay silent, like a child being scowled.

"You need to control your god-damn anger!" He yells before swearing, and then again. "FUCK! What were you thinking?"

He paces some more, raking a hand through his hair, tugging hair, jaw working until he finally says, "You're on a scholarship Beau! You are in **no** position to be getting eliminated from races let alone competition finals like this!"

I sit quietly, watching him pace the bathroom tugging the ends of his hair. It's like a prey watching its predator's moves, assessing how much of a threat they are—seeing how much shit I am in.

If there is one thing I know about Oliver from the past two years of swimming with him, it's that he doesn't lose his cool. That's what makes him a good captain. He is always the man of control and regimen. He's calculative, he analyses the full situation before acting. He's smart and collected. He's *calm* .

He *'s not so* calm now...

This would be a monumental moment if I wasn't the one caught in the crossfire. Maybe in a sick twisted way, the 'old me' would feel proud. Proud, that I made Oliver Fowler lose his cool, that *I* was the one to make him snap.

But that's the old me, new me feels sick—feels anxiously guilty. Feels like shit.

New me *sucks* .

He grabs my collar, roughly pulling me towards him and effectively out of my thoughts.

"Why? Why did you do that? Why would you self-sabotage yourself like that?" his eyes flicker between my own.

I look away avoiding his eyes. I mutter under my breath, "It's not like I was going to beat you anyway."

He shakes his head in disbelief for a second before he responds. "You're right." He says honestly. "You wouldn't have beaten me."

The arrogance of this man, someone needs to knock him down a notch or two, or *ten* ?

"Or not," he shrugs. "Guess we will never know."

I grind my teeth.

"Whatever, Golden boy." I try to shrug off his grip but he doesn't let me go.

In fact, his grip tightens, eyes darkening. "I thought I told you not to call me that because I'm *more* than willing to change your mind on that."

I pause.

I don't think we are talking about the same thing anymore...

His eyes flick back to mine. "You can't pull shit like this."

I roll my eyes, ignoring the irregular thumping of my heart. "Why do you care?"

He ignores what I say and lets go of my arms taking a step back. "Pull that shit again Beau, and I won't be this easy on you."

I scoff, arching a brow. "This is easy?"

He chuckles leaning back in my space, standing to his full height and those few inches feel like a lot. "Yes, this is *easy* ."

There's a loud banging on the door. "Oi Beau, get your arse out here!" Coaches voice yells.

Coach is next.

He yells at me and I take it. Again. I sit there and take all the shit he gives me. I don't even bat an eye. All I want to do is crawl into bed and never get out. Screw swimming. I don't even care that I got disqualified from my last race, that I risk losing my scholarship. I don't care at all. And that would worry me— *if I cared* .

After a few good minutes of Coach yelling at me, he sees me.

Really sees me.

He sees how broken I am. I may have landed more punches on Josh, but I'm the bruised and battered one. I'm the beaten one.

I'm the *broken* one.

Coach stop yelling at me when he sees it gets no response out of me. His eyes soften for a second and he sighs deeply before sitting down so he is eye to eye with me.

"We're going to talk about this later." He touches my shoulder, a comforting touch. "Let's get the team back to the hotel now and get ready for our team dinner tonight."

He gets up, pausing at the door to look back at me. "Don't worry kid, you're going to be okay. Everything is going to be alright. "

I sigh, rubbing my palms on my pants and getting up.

I hope so Coach. I *really* hope so.

***

Fries always lift my mood. They always have and I always thought they would... except, it's not.

Not *tonight* .

I stab my fork into my food almost aggressively, shuffling it around on my plate.There's nothing wrong with the food, in fact, it looks so fucking good. I know it is from the multiple moans of the swim team and the shovelling of food in their mouth.

But I don't have an appetite tonight.

I feel sick.

My knuckles are bruised, the skin split, red and raw. I get a sick feeling in my gut every time I see them, so I try to keep my eyes focused on the plate.

I think I single-handedly fucked up our team's chance of winning overall points for this race, and *everyone* knows it.

Not to mention risking my spot on the team and scholarship, the consequences of my actions have well sunk in over the last few hours. God—I can't believe I sucker-punched Josh.

I mean... *yeah* , he deserved it. But there is such a thing as wrong timing, and thinking back—I could have picked a better time.

"You going to eat it, or just play with it all night?" Sophie nudges me with her elbow beside me.

"Play," is my short blunt answer.

Andy grabs my fries with his bare hands and relocates them on his plate, then continues to eat them with a self-content expression on his face.

I glare at him. That bitch.

He gives me an innocent look. "What? Play with the salt, pepper, and shit. These chips are too damn good to be wasted."

I sigh, looking back down at my plate.

My temper is short, I know this. I am always angry, I have anger in me that built up since I was a kid. It's a burning red inside of me that started from my Father, and that shit has only ever grown.

I have to unlearn the anger. I'm tired of being angry all the time.

It doesn't help watching Tasha flirt so shamelessly with Oliver. I don't know why I care so much, I hate the guy, right? I mean it's a hate, but I-want-to-kiss-you-sometimes, kind of relationship. Totally normal.

I try to ignore the hand Tasha places on Oliver's arm. I really do. But my eyes are unwillingly dragging back. I stare daggers at her hand.

I never knew I could feel such hatred towards a *hand* .

I try to suppress the shiver of anger that runs through me, I forcibly unclench my fists and take a few deep breaths. *Chill Beau. No more anger.*

I silently listen to the team chatting away, to Tasha talking Oliver's ear off and Ryan blaming his bad race start on slipping.

I clear my throat, interrupting their conversation. "Look, guys, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking straight today and it probably cost us places."

Oliver nods, his expression hard. "You're right, you weren't thinking straight."

"Ha, opposite of straight," Andy chuckles to himself.

I shoot him a dry look.

Tasha shakes her head, "yeah, well our team could have placed first on points if you didn't get disqualified."

I grimace.

"And our team could have placed first if you didn't butcher your last race too," Sophie rolls his eyes.

Tasha narrows her eyes on her.

Sophie shrugs, "yeah, Beau did get disqualified from the last race. But if any one of us placed a litter high on some of our races, excluding Oliver, we could have won as well."

I smile at Sophie and she winks back.

"Yeah, but we didn't place higher because we weren't good enough. Beau got eliminated because he was being dumb," Ben scoffs.

"You know, I think what Beau did was cool," Ryan speaks up from across the table, surprising everyone, including me.

"Cool? How is beating the shit out of someone cool?" Oliver counters with an eyebrow arched, not looking impressed.

Ryan shrugs and I hold my breath, hoping he keeps his no-filter-mouth shut. "Josh is a dick, he had it coming for him."

"If you don't like the guy, beat him. Preferably in the *water* and *without* fists , " Oliver grunts, chucking another fry in his mouth.

The team snicker.

"As if that will satisfy, Beau" Andy scoffs. "He only cares about beating you."

Oliver's eyebrows raise and he suddenly looks intrigued.

My face burns.

Fucking Andy.

"Is that so?" Oliver questions, paying his full attention to me now.

I ignore him and shove a slice of, now cold, pizza in my mouth, despite having no appetite.

"You only want to beat me, *hmm* ." He drums his fingers on the table, looking thoughtful for a moment. "What would you give me if I let you win?"

I feel the heat of his words sink in, burning through layers of my skin right to the bone.

"You can't possibly let him win!" Ryan splutters in outrage. "That ruins the whole point of winning!"

Oliver shrugs, not taking his eye off me and not letting mine leaves his. "Not if the deal is good."

I shake my head, annoyed at the thought. "When I win, and I *will* win, it will be because I am better than you! Not because you let me."

I'm insulted he thinks I can't beat him. I only a little behind his times.

Oliver leans back in his chair looking amused. He crosses his arms across his chest, showcasing his muscular arms and veins stretching up his forearms. He reeks of confidence and arrogance, it irritates the fuck out of me.

I press my forearms onto the table leaning closer, eyes narrowed in anger. " *What* , you don't believe it?"

He tilts his head to the side. "I didn't say that."

"So you think I can beat you?"

He looks thoughtful for a moment, rubbing his slight stubble as he thinks. "I think you will, *one* day. But not for the reasons you think." His voice is low. Too low.

I lean closer intrigued. We are in our own world now, only us. Everyone else's conversation blurred into the background. Everyone else out of focus and Oliver is the only thing I am seeing.

He leans closer in return grinning, like he is enjoying this game we are playing.
"You won't beat me because you are better than me, because you're faster, or even have better technique than me. You'll beat me because my mind will be more focused on the *competition* than the race."

Chapter 13

I pull at my collar, it's uncomfortably tight around the soft flesh of my neck and I'm overly hot and twitchy. My breathing is hollow and my fingers numb from clenching my hands too tight.

I'm a mess .

I focus way too hard on walking up the stairs, one foot in front of the other, occasionally having to remind myself to breathe along the way.

The sky is darkening quickly, and the homeroom I buzzing with noise. It's Thursday night, a big night for all on-campus uni students. People are hanging around the common room only starting their night — I want nothing more than to *end* mine.

To end this fucking horrible day.

I walk carefully, avoiding the creaky parts of the floor. I stick to the furthest side from the main lounge room where multiple students are laughing and drinking. Normally, I would be down there with them (for the booze of course). But I'm not drinking tonight.

Most of the swim team is in this hall thanks to the significant discounts and scholarships they received for being in the swim team's top squad. Means I get to see their faces way too much and hear their voice way too regularly.

Oliver isn't though, he has a flat near campus with some mates I think. But since a lot of the team are here he's over a bit.

More than usual recently.

Everything's been a bit of a blur the last few days. Coach suspended me from swimming for two weeks due to my little punch out with Josh. Which is quite the inconvenience since our last and final competition, *Nationals* , is in four weeks.

So I can kiss any hope of beating Oliver down the drain.

My shoulders slump further; it was not like I was going to beat him anyway. I guess I just had this fire, this swindle of hope that maybe, *just maybe* , I could... As if that would solve all my problems. That If I bet the best maybe people would like me better—maybe my Father would *like* me better, want to know me better.

Because everyone loves a *winner* .

Maybe if I won for once, I would be worth something. Be someone of value, like Oliver. But now I see the truth, that far-fetched goal is merely a *dream* —and I have woken up. So I will have to learn to live with myself as a loser.

Yesterday my Father messaged me asking how my school camp went, obviously missing the part where I didn't go on a school camp and I was at a swim competition. I didn't reply.

And *today* ...

Henry's funeral.

A faded blur of people and time passing too slowly. Dragging on too long. Hurting too much. Not just hitting too close to home, but *demolishing* the home. I have never felt so helpless in my life, and all I could do was sit there and take it.

His Mum was a mess; a shell of the woman she usually is. It was tough sitting there and having to be forced to come to terms with the reality of it. I don't think I really let it sink in—really *believed* it. Until today.

Reality didn't just hit me hard...

It slapped me.

It *kicked* me.

It threw me a sharp deadly uppercut hitting me square in the heart. Stopping my heart for too long and taking too much of my breath away.

Reality sucks arse. *It really fucking sucks.*

I'm so emotionally hung over right now. I don't have the energy to deal with anyone or anything. Stomached empty but I can't eat anything. Mind a mess and I can't think. I feel a bit like a zombie today, just going through the motions, just getting from A to B without any real awareness of what's happening. A quiet passenger in the drive of life.

A familiar voice in the common room catches my ear. "Training was... actually really good today," Ryans says.

I pause in my step.

"That's only because Beau steals all of Oliver's coaching, coach hog."

My face hardens. They think I want him over analysing everything I do? it's a pain in my arse more than anything.

There's a grunt in objection, deep and undeniably Oliver's voice. "I don't give Beau all my attention."

Tiffany scoffs. "Ah, yeah you do."

"Your just jealous he doesn't focus more on you," Sophie comments.

"I'm not jealous, Beau just obviously needs more help, needs someone to babysit him," Tiffany says smugly.

I scowl. I don't want to hear anymore.

I start to leave but the wooden floor creaks under my weight, signaling to the people in the common room of my presence.

"Damn, look who the cat brought in..."

I sigh turning to face the group, despite how bad I just want to ignore them and go to my room. It's better to not get on the bad side of the people you see all the fucking time.

There are more people than usual lounging around the room drinking. Seems like people are in the mood for partying tonight. I internally groan, knowing I'm going to get little sleep tonight.

My eyes scan the crowd, falling on half the swim team. Sophie, Ryan, Tiffany, and Oliver amongst them. There's some people in our dorms that I've seen around but I don't know. I don't really make an effort to know anyone I don't have to. Hell, I think Oliver is friends with more people here then me,

The lighting is dull light and the furniture splashes of bright colours and modern shapes, it does little to hide the boxes of alcohol around the side of it though.

My eyes automatically and involuntary fall to Oliver. But only because he naturally draws attention with his large form splayed across the couch. He's wearing a button-up shirt that hugs his chest snugly, a few buttons undone at his collar revealing his smooth skin. His hair is ruffled slightly and expression *bored* .

There's a girl next to him, sitting too close for comfort. She is talking to him, her hand sliding up his arm. She's pretty.

Really pretty.

Ryan whistles when I step into the large doorway of the room. He eyes my clothing with a surprised look. Tiffany and Sophie look surprised too, their eyes widened.

Oliver turns his head and eyes me lazily, he instantly straightens, sitting up as his eyes run over me hotly. He shakes the pretty girl's hand off of his arm.

It must be because I'm not wearing my usual attire...

Instead of my usual sweatpants and shorts and my faded old t-shirts, I'm dressed in nice black pants and a grey buttoned-up shirt. My hair is done tidy instead of the mess it usually is and I know I look nothing like I usually do.

I'm glad the lighting in here is shit, hopefully, then they can't see the bags under my eyes.

"Wow, if it ain't Beau all dressed up looking sharp." Tiffany comments, eyes running over me.

Oliver's eyes narrow and lips press together as his eyes take me in.

"What's the occasion heart breaker? Someone brave enough to go on a date with you?" Ryan snorts.

Maybe that would piss me off... *if*, I didn't have the day I've had today.

"Nope. No date." I shove my hands in my pockets taking a step in the direction of the dorms, making it real obvious I don't want to talk. I *really* don't want to talk. My throat is raw and energy non-existent. I need this day to be over.

"No date? What are you so dressed up for then? Trying to get lucky tonight?"

I grimace. "No."

"Come on Beau, you got to give us something. Who's this brave chic willing to put up with your moody arse?" Tiffany eggs on.

Oliver crosses his arms over his chest, eyes dark and narrowed. The rest of the team intently waiting for my response. Curious. *Intrigued* .

I grit my teeth, knowing they aren't going to let this drop. They will keep on badgering me until they get a response, or they will spread some stupid false gossip around the team.

"A Funeral." I breathe, voice dead of emotion. "My hot date was a funeral. You happy?" I wave my arms out.

There's an awkward silence. A parting of lips. A flash of sympathy and I decide it's best that I leave now. Everyone's out for a party, for a drink, to get lucky—and I'm not.

"I'm heading to bed. Night." I'm already walking to my dorm, my strides longer than usual, and my desire to get to my room stronger than usual.

When I am in my room, I suddenly feel suffocated in my small room. Like there's not enough air in here. Trapped.

I stride to the side of the room frantically opening my window as far as it will go. But it's not enough. I rake a hand through my hair pacing, trying to calm down the whirlwind of emotions churning inside me. I sit down on my bed, so fucking exhausted and tired. Unsure of what to do with myself.

I grab the ball on my beside table and start to throw it up to the roof and catch it with one hand on repeat.

There's a knock. I ignore it the first time, assuming it's for one of the rooms beside me because no one comes to my room. Occuastionly Andy, but he's back home for the weekend. But then it's louder and undeniably on *my* door.

I pull the open to see the one and only Oliver Fowler.

Too tired to deal with this I go to shut the door in his face, too numb to give a shit if it's rude.

He slips his foot inside, stopping me. He easily pushes the door open and walks in. I scoff stepping back. I sigh resigning, too tired to try to stop him.

Ignoring him I slump down on my bed, sprawling my body along the bed in a lazy manner.

"What do you want Fowler?" I grunt, voice tired. I grab the tennis ball and start throwing it back at the roof again and catching it with one hand.

He frowns, eyes not leaving me. "I came to see if you're.." he dies off scratching the back of his head. " *alright* ?" He cringes at his words, like he thinks it's a stupid question to ask.

Maybe I'm not as good at hiding my emotions as I thought. But Oliver's always been good at reading me.

I don't remove my gaze from the ball. "Well, I'm fine. You can leave now." I deadpan.

Oliver rakes a hand through his hair, then sits down at the chair by my desk. He stretches his long legs out and leans back, making himself way too comfortable.

I pause my throwing. "What part of, 'you can leave now', did you not understand?"

Oliver grabs my textbook from my desk and absently starts flicking through the pages. "None of it, I guess," he shrugs nonchalantly.

My hand tightens around the undeserving tennis ball. I breathe hard through my nose, forcing myself to continue to through the ball back up.

Up. Down.

Up. Down.

The chair squeaks as Oliver leans further back into it, his large figure dwarfing my chair.

I grit my teeth, trying to ignore the stupid strand of hair that falls across his forehead and the way his lips press together as he lazily reads my book. He's so attractive it hurts to look at him sometimes.

He's going to leave, I reassure myself. He has to. Who wants to spend their Thursday night with a depressed loner boy instead of partying with their friends.

***

He doesn't leave.

He just sits there quietly, minding his own business in his nice going-out shirt. With his delicious cologne drifting my way and his fitting baby blue dress shirt.

"Don't you have a party to go to?" I grunt, glancing over at him to catch his response.

He shrugs. "No."

Ball up. Ball falls back down.

Up. Down.

"If you're waiting for me to break, or lose it or some shit. I'm not."

At least not while he's here.

Oliver lifts his head from the book, looks at me and nods. "Okay." Then he looks back down at the book, continuing to read.

I groan, because this is painful.

"Oliver. I don't need a fucking babysitter," I say spitefully, the tennis ball long forgotten now.

Oliver undoes the top few buttons of his shirt with one, not lifting his eyes from his phone which he's started typing on. "I'm far from it that, Beau."

I scoff. "Yeah? Cause sounds like you are, especially at training."

His head finally lifts, eyes finally meeting mine. "You heard that?"

I focus back on the ceiling. "Of course I did."

He releases a breath of air. " *Beau* ... I'm not babysitting you. Is it that hard to believe that I like your company? Or that I'm trying to keep *you* company."

I snort. "Yes."

He huffs, gripping the ends of his hair in frustration, like he's never had to try this hard to get someone to trust him before.

I feel a pinch of guilt. I'm difficult, I know I am. But I've learnt the hard way what happens when you trust people, and Olivers has already gotten close enough to me. If I let him any closer, there will be no going back.

I start to through the ball at the ceiling again, but it's different this time. Another new emotion swirling in my chest this time. And no matter how many times I throw the ball up and catch it, I'm unable to ignore the feeling in my gut telling me that tonight is going to be a *long* night.

***

Vote If you enjoyed this chapter and want another.

Love y'all xx

Chapter 14

It's 9:42 and my arm is sore from throwing the ball at my roof.

10:14: I've swapped to my other arm.

11:31: It's loud. People partying, music thumping, and walls vibrating. I've stopped throwing the ball now.

11:40: Oliver's drifting asleep. I'm struggling not to look over at him. To not notice that he parts his lips when he sleeps and his eyelashes fan his cheeks. My chest feels heavy.

By 12:04, I've had **enough** .

I push off my bed.

Oliver's head is lolled to the side, his eyes fluttered close, lips still slightly parted. Still looking like an angel fallen from heaven. A *devil* angel.

A part of me doesn't want to disturb him, he looks so peaceful asleep—but the other part is *pissed* .

Pissed—because there's *no way* I'm getting to sleep with Oliver in my dorm room. It's not happening. Not when this stupid dorm room is already *too* small. I'm practically suffocating in his proximity and his cologne.

Fuck he smells good. I make conscious effort to not breath so deeply, my head gets dizzy when I do.

His presence makes it impossible for me to think *straight* .

I almost hate myself for considering to wake him up, he looks so relaxed, so peaceful and content.
And hell, he's gorgeous.

I spent way too long staring at his face, at *him* , trying to pick out all the flaws. But it just leaves me feeling very small and imperfect in the end. Leaves a heat in my lower belly.

It takes a minute, but I manage to muster up the will to do it.
To wake him up.

Come on Beau, you won't get any sleep otherwise if he's here—and lord knows you need sleep.

I step closer grimacing. But the closer I get, the better I see. Oliver moves his head to the side slightly, a curl falling onto his forehead. I also see how tired he looks, almost like he too has been having trouble sleeping.

Something poking out of his pocket catches my eye. It's half hanging out of his pocket, multiple keys. *One* key, in particular, catches my attention though...

Without letting myself overthink it, I grab the keys, quietly, careful to not wake him up.

Let's hope he stays asleep for a while.

***

The water is cold and the pool is eerily quiet. The bright white lights almost make it look like the perfect horror scene location... I try not to think too much about that as I swim laps.

It helps that when I swim, I usually don't think. I just let my body take control, let it flow through me and I go with it. I have never been the type of person to go with the flow—except when it comes to swimming.

I swim length after length. I get bored, it's *boring* . But it's a comforting boring, a boring I know I am good. A boring that feels as familiar as breathing.

For the first time in what feels like forever, I don't swim to win. I don't swim so I can be the best. I don't swim so I can beat Oliver or to have the glory.

I simply swim because: I like it.

And fuck if that isn't crazy. I can't remember the last time I did something without external-based motives, and just because it was *fun* .

Somewhere along the line swimming stopped being fun. Stopped being for my soul and started being for the medal. For the badge of honour, the glory, the respect and adoration. So I could feel like I was worth something.

Swimming was never the same after that.

I started swimming because Mum was forcing me to do that or athletics. I figured swimming would be fewer people trying to talk to me. I was 10.

I got good fast. I was winning golds left, right, centre. I won so many competitions that my Mum had to put my medals in the attic because they were overfilling my draws. She used to think I wanted to win badly because I loved the sport. Really, I just thought if I were good enough, my Dad might show up one.

I won the national title for my age a few times which got me the scholarship for this college. And then I met Oliver Fowler in my last year of high school.

The first time he beat me, I shrugged it off. Blamed it on sore legs. Thought it to be a rough day.

The second time, he didn't even look fazed. Like he expected it.

I almost punched the guy.

And the *third* time... that's the moment I started hating Oliver Fowler.

But somewhere along the line, I think that might have changed...
And that thought scares me.

***

It's late when I get back, but the night is still alive with bustling students. The number of people I encountered stumbling across the grounds drunk was concerning.

Oliver is asleep when I sneak into my dorm. Sprawled out along my chair, his big form looking surprisingly comfortable on the small chair.

I try to be quiet, but I end up tripping on one of my shoes that I left carelessly around and fall into the wall ungracefully with a loud thud. His keys clatter to the ground next. I wince.

Oliver jolts awake.

He takes a second to register where he is, and then his eyes flick to me.

His eyes take in my damp hair and red chest, the goosebumps on my skin and the red rims around my eyes.

"You went swimming?" He rubs a hand over trying to wake himself up, his voice horse with sleep. I try not to find it as hot as I do.

I open and close my mouth like a fish, unsure how to explain, because it's weird. Who the fuck swims in the middle of the night?

"Your band from the pool Beau."

He sounds like a scowl ding parent. I almost roll my eyes. Here goes golden boy again, being the rule police.

"Who cares, no one saw me, no one knows I..." I wince, realising my error.

"Mmh except for the person whose keys to the pool you stole, and the swim captain at that," Oliver says eyeing his keys on the ground, his voice still sounding sexy, an eyebrow arched.

I scowl. "What? Are you going to tittle-tattle on me, Fowler? Run to coach and keep me in time out for another week?" I shoulder past him to my bed, stripping off my hoodie as I go. "Well go ahead Golden boy, I don't even fucking care."

He crosses his arms over his chest, looking amused as slumps back into the chair.

I try not to notice how rugged and hot he looks tired, his hair mussed and eyes lidded.

I narrow my eyes, watching him across the short distance of my room. "It's not like you're going to tell anyway," I say, portraying confidence I don't fully feel.

He cocks his head to the side, intrigued, curious. "And why is that?"

"Because.. you like picking on me *too much* . You just love correcting my every flaw and fault. My fuck ups and *failures* ," I say spitefully. "But most of all... you like **beating** me. And telling coach would mean your scapegoat is gone for longer."

He looks at me for a moment, expression unreadable. Shakes his head, rolls his jaw.

" *Perhaps* .." he considers. "Or maybe I just want you to get better? Maybe I know you're good, and I want you to be great. *Maybe*.. me critiquing you makes you swim faster. Swim harder. Perform *better* ."

He leans forwards, resting his arms on his knees. "Maybe I have to be the bad guy, so you can be your best."

He shrugs unapologetically. "I can be your bad guy, Beau. The one that tells you when your movements are off and your stroke is shit. When your turning is bad and your position is wrong. But don't misread my intentions; I'm only the bad guy because I'm the *good guy* ."

All my witty snarky comments that I hold in a special part of my brain for our interactions, runs dry. Blanks out. My jaw is slack and my heart is doing this weird jumping thing.

I don't know what to say to this.

What do you say to that?

This throws me off-guard. This whole, 'kill them with kindness' thing he has got going on—is hard to navigate. This whole, 'I care for you', even though I've been a massive dick to him—I don't understand.

Our relationship *doesn't* go like this.

We insult each other, we bicker. We are *fierce* competitors. We are supposed to have a rivalry going on!

So why isn't he playing the part?

"Whatever" I mumble quietly, pretending like he didn't just make my heart hurt. Like him caring about me—wanting me to do well, even though I am his competition, doesn't mess with my head.

I don't know how to respond appropriately. I've never been good at this type of stuff.

So instead, I pretend he isn't being nice and making my stomach feel all weird and shit. Instead, I go to my drawers and shuffle around for my clothes until I grab my PJs. It's 1 in the morning and I'm well ready to go to bed now.

I chuck him some of my shorts. "You can sleep in this."

For a reason I can't explain, I don't tell him to leave. I want him to stay. I'll never admit it, but secretly, right now (and only this one time), I don't hate his company. It's nice to not be alone on a night like tonight. And I don't know if he could tell or not, but I'm glad he stayed.

When I have my PJs in my hand, I flush.

Am I supposed to get changed in front of him?

I don't turn to look at him, instead, I decide to rip it off like a band-aid and start to get changed. I pull my shirt over my head and pull my shorts off. I keep my back to him while I pull my PJ shirt over my head. Even though he's seen me in less at swim trainings, this feels different.

I feel his eyes on me and I know I'm red. We don't talk, no words needed.

He gets changed next, and I force myself to get in my bed and look up at the ceiling. He crawls under the covers soon after and my heart is pounding out of my chest. I shuffle right to the end of the bed to give him as much space as I can.

My bed is small, a single bed, forcing our arms to brush. His leg to lightly brush mine. Oliver doesn't seem to mind that much though, he rolls casually onto his stomach and stretches out, tucking an arm under the pillow. His head is facing me and his breath brushing my shoulder.

I shiver.

His even steady breath calms me, but his proximity and skin touching mine cancels out the calming effect it seems. We lay there for a while before I work the courage to speak.

"Oliver?" I say, voice weaker than I'd like.

"Mmm?" he hums, sinking further into his pillow.

"Have you lost many races before?"

His eyes are still closed but his lip tugs at the corner. "A lot more then I'd like."

My eyes widen. "Really?" I've never seen him lose a racer. Ever. It's hard to imagine it, I can only imagine a mini Oliver being all lanky and shit and kicking everyone's arse.

"There's this one kid that I could never beat for a while. He won the races easily, smooth and effortless. Like a fish in water. And I was second place for a whole year when I was in second to last year of high school."

I look up to the roof, mulling over his words. "Did it bother you? Him beating you?"

Oliver is quiet for a moment, like he's thinking it through.
"No," he admits. "I thought he was awesome, if anything. I wanted to be his friend, I wanted him to think the same about me. I worked my butt last year of school to get as good as him, to get better. Make him notice me."

I turn to look at him. "And did it?"

Oliver opens his eyes, a lopsided grin on his lips. "I don't know... *did it?* "

My eyebrows shoot to my hairline. The air leaving my lungs. "That was... *me* ?" I can't hide the disbelief in my voice.

He nods, watching me carefully.
"And the day I beat you, you looked at me like I murdered your puppy. I got the memo pretty quickly you weren't interested being friends."

I grimace, feeling guilty. I remember that race. The first race I lost in a long time.

I let out a heavy breath. "That was the only race my Dad showed up to," I admit. "I was trying to impress him. Instead he told me that I should train harder, that second place is the 1st loser."

"Fuck him," Oliver grunts, leans forwards and sloppily kisses my shoulder.

I would laugh — if I wasn't on fire— if I didn't want him to do that again.

***

Author Note:
I sat my butt down and forced myself to finish this chapter for you all. Took some discipline with my fish focus—but I eventually got there.

Not gonna lie, I feel a bit a pressure when writing for it to be good now that there's a lot more people reading the story. It used to only be a few and now there's a lot lol.

Very flattered and appreciative of all the support you guys have given me for this story. Your nice comments honestly make my day.

Vote if you enjoyed the chapter and want the next one ❤

Chapter 15

I feel a fire. A *burning* .

I grit my teeth pushing through it. An effort that feels twice as hard and a body that feels three times too heavy. But I welcome the burn with open arms. I embrace the pain because it's distracting; which is reward enough.

I'm not following any routine or pace, I'm just running. *Fast* . Away from everything. I'm not a runner—not by a long shot. The only sport I'm half decent at is swimming, *obviously* . But I'm still band from the pool so this feels like my only option.

When my emotions feel like too much, I've learnt that making your body hurt is a pretty good distraction. A pain simpler to focus on.

A student runs past me, her looking a lot less red then I can only imagine mine would look like. She looks graceful, each stride effortless and breathing measured. She's wearing a dark grey top.

Gray .

Oliver's boxers were gray.

My face burns, and I'm pretty sure it isn't from my lack of fitness this time.

I run harder.

My breathing is loud now, loud enough that I can hear it over my music. Perspiration between my shoulder blades and curls of hair sticking to my damp forehead. My thigh muscle won't quit shaking and it's starting to bug me, but I keep on running.

I look up to the sky, avoiding looking at the grey top girl as she runs past me. The sky is blue.

Blue, like Oliver's eyes.

Oh *fuck* .

I close my eyes. My legs are on fire, my chest burning, but it is my mind that is crippling me the most.

I run harder, my distraction not efficient enough.
Not distracting enough.

I look at my feet. At the pavement of the road below my feet. The sound of my feet hitting the road. White lines guiding the road.

White.

My sheets are white...

Sheets that had a boy in them last night and this morning.

My mind flashes back to this morning...

The bed's too small . The bed's too small and Oliver's *too close* . The bed's too small, Olivers too close, and I'm painfully hard right now.

I tighten my jaw, embarrassed. It's not my fault, I try to reassure myself. He's just... he's breathing on my collar. Hot breathe. And he's just touching my skin. And he's topless.

He's just a *really* pretty boy that is half-naked in my bed.

I bite my lip. Hard.

A pretty boy in my bed that's also my swimming captain. My biggest rival. My enemy.

And he's in MY bed.

It's innocent enough, he's not even trying, not even doing anything. But I'm horny and I can't remember the last time I... *yeah* ...

And just thinking about that now makes me want to shove a pillow over my face. But I can't, because Oliver is asleep very close to me, and if I move he is sure to wake up.

Did I mention he's topless? Cause he is.

The sheet hugs around his hip giving a generous view of his toned chest well established from countless hours of swimming. Years of it has made his body strong, primed for swimming. His hair is tousled, curly strands falling across his forehead. His pink lips parted slightly and light freckles dusted across his nose and the tops of his cheeks.

His freckles are absolutely adorable.
I fucking hate them.

There's soft yellow rays of light shining through my crappy curtains that do nothing to hide the light. It's early, I can tell from how quiet the hall is and how cold it is. It's always freezing in the mornings here. The hall's heating is shit and they are too cheap to fix it.

Oliver shifts his body, further into me, seeking further warmth. But I'm trapped in between the wall and him. No escape.

I trip. I'm not paying attention to my step and I tripped over a stone and face-planted onto the ground. I've grazed my hands and knees on the road, cursing as I stumble back to my feet. The grazes burn, a further heat to the fire. And I want nothing more than to fall back into bed with food magically appearing in my hand.

But I can't stop running.

Because fire in my legs, the burning of my chest, the blistering of my knees and hands—aren't distraction enough from the true fire.

He was warm, *really* warm. Skin on fire. Or maybe that's just mine? Either way, it's hot in here.

I'm feeling hot, Oliver *is* hot—we're all hot in here. And even asleep he made my heart stutter. I'm trapped in an embrace that is scarily good.

Suddenly the bed is too big. It's too big and he's not close enough. It's too big, he's not close enough and I'm so turned on. Feeling real needy right now.

If Oliver were awake, would he be this close to me voluntarily? Is it wrong for him to be so close to me when he doesn't really know it? Would it disturb him?

I let out a quiet puff of breath. Why the fuck am I questing this, he's the one who has hogged up the bed space. He's the one that has me pushed up against the wall. He's the one who's shifting his body further into me and hand is currently slipping under the rim of my shirt.

His skin is hot. So much of it is exposed, and not enough. His eyes are closed, he mumbles incoherent words under his breath. His hand inches towards the skin under my shirt, fingers brushing my rib cage. I bite my lip containing any sound threatening to come out.

I am completely flustered. Prisoner to his touch. His hand drags down my chest, dangerously low. I suck in an uneven breath.

He's pushing it.

He's pushing it and he doesn't even know it.

His hand curls around my waist, tugging me closer to him. Engulfing me further in his body. He lets out a huff of air and tries to pull me closer, but there's no more space between us.

Tired and frustrated I grind my teeth in annoyance. I'm not a cuddlier.
No way in hell.

So why am I not pushing him off of me?

Technically, I'm not hugging him back. I'm just *enduring* it. Putting up with it. I don't like it or anything...

But then he does something that is too much—makes enduring it *too hard* .

His palm spams along my chest, digits curling into my skin almost possessively.

I suck in a sharp breath. The contacts too much skin on skin, too possessive, too hot.

Oliver bolts upright. Alert and rigid at my sharp intake.

It takes a second before he notices the position we are in... Until he noticed our proximity and where his hand is.

He lets out a surprised throaty sound from the back of his throat and jolts back, the force of his movement causing him to fall off the side of my bed and onto the ground with a loud thud.

I have to bite my lip to stop myself from laughing.

He swears lowly under his breath, getting to his feet steadily. His eyes flick to me, observing the slither of the skin of my stomach exposed, from his hand bunching it up.

He says fuck under his breath before looking up at the roof briefly. "I didn't mean to.. I thought It *was* .. " he dies off, clearing his throat and rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

I try not to find it as endearing as I do.

A car honks and I jolt in fright, drawing myself back to the present. Jesus Christ. I stumble to the side of the road letting the car pass. My heart is racing and my body is alert. This is why I don't run, I'm a fucking mess of a runner. I zone into my own world that I quickly become accident-prone and a walking hazard.

Anyways, where was I? Oh yeah, a flustered Oliver fell out of my bed...

I try not to look, but his body, him, he's easy on the eyes. A sight for sore eyes. But he's also painful to look at. An unobtainable beauty that I could never reach, and I hate him sometimes for it. I divert my eyes to look anywhere but him, lips pursed in annoyance.

"You should leave," I say, voice cold, a total contrast to the current temperature of my body.

I don't have to look to know he is frowning. "Right," he says, voice empty as he shuffles around my room trying to find his clothes.

Leave before I do something absurd, like tell you to *stay* .

When I get back to my dorm, I'm red-faced, sweaty and both my knees and hands have grazes on them, my knees getting the brunt of it though. Bloods dripping down making a mess, It looks worse then it. Stings like a bitch though every time I step.

Andy in the hall's common room when he see's me. I go to the island bench and slump down wincing as I go, my body a heap of sore muscles and pain.

He shakes his head in disappointment. "Fuck, what did you do to yourself."

I walk past him straight to the chair at the island table. "I went for a run."

Andy snickers and I shoot him a glare.

He puts his hands up in surrender. "My bad, I didn't realise you were a runner."

"I'm not," I grumble.

The sun is out now, but everyone must of had a pretty big night because the common room is still pretty empty. I'm glad though, too many people

around make me feel suffocated.

"You should sort your knees out, the are going to get blood everywhere."

I huff laying my head down on the bench, my lack of sleep catching up on me.

"What you cooking?" I say, propping my head on my hands in intrigue and as the smell of something good whiffs past my nose.

"Eggs," Andy hums.

He serves the scrabbled on on two plates and pushes one towards me. I give him a grateful grin and dig in, not realising how hungry I am until I start eating.

Jess walks into the kitchen along with Ryan and Tiffany.

"Guys, I saw Oliver sneaking out this morning... wearing the same clothing as last night."

Andy glances at me, giving a suspicious look as he eats his food.

Ryan looks intrigued, Tiffany too.
"Did our captain go for a booty call last night?"

Jess shrugs. "Looked liked it."

"Lucky bitch." Tiffany mutters under her breath.

I stuff more food in my mouth.

"Oliver doesn't seem the type to do booty calls," snorts Ryan. "Even if he did.. it would be the person going to his, not the other way around."

Jess shrugs. "Maybe he likes this person?"

"Or maybe he just stayed the night in someones dorm because he can," I grumble.

Ryan and Tiffany give me a weird. " *Righttt..* cause our shitty dorms are prime comfort compared to his fancy flat with his own room with probably a king size bed."

"He has a king size bed?"

Tiffany shrugs, grinning. "Don't know, but would't I love to find out."

My brows crumple, I rub my chest where a tight feeling has formed.

"Calm down tiger," Andy scoffs, turning the tap on to wash his dishes. "I'm pretty sure Olivers got his eyes set on someone."

I choke on my food. Jess pats my back and I take a big gulp of the water Andy offers me. After I am not dying anymore, I manage to get the words out, "who do you reckon Oliver has his eye on?"

Ryan steals a bit of my toast, but I barely noticed it. "It's probably that guy who was flirting with him hardcore at training the other day." He said casually while chewing on *my* food.

What guy?

I rub my chest again. What is up with my chest today?

Jess hums in agreement. "Right, the exchange student from England. He was quick in the water, not Oliver quick, but *quick* ."

I give my chest a few short hits, maybe it's sore from my run?

"God, he was soo hot though. And don't even get me started on his accent," Tiffany practically drools. "I wouldn't blame Oliver if he decided to take him up on that date offer."

Date?

Thats it. I stand up, drawing everyones attention, but I'm not focused on that.

"Where you going?" Andy calls out, cause I'm already halfway to the door.

"To get rid of my fucking pool ban and get back into the water." I call over my shoulder.

I distantly hear Ryan call out, "Ha! Good luck with that!"

Good luck. *pfff* . I don't need *luck* .

What I do need though: is to know who **the fuck** this new guy is?

Author note: I've written this chapter enough times that it is starting to become painful. I'm sick of it now lol. But I don't like to release a chapter until I am semi happy with it. But good news is I'm halfway through the next chapter.

It was my birthday the other day. I had a massive celebration and I feel as if I have aged just trying to run it. It was chaotic. I would prefer a more mellow thing, but I'm a twin and my twin wanted to do that so...

Anyway appreciate your patience, hope you are all good and reading provides the joy and escape you are after. Love ya.

Vote if you want the next chapter ❤

Chapter 16

As soon as I am through the doors, it feels like *home* . The unmistakable strong scent of chlorine, the humid air, the sound of splashing of water.

Fuck I've missed it.

I see the swimmers in the water, puffing and red-faced as their coach gives them instructions.
I'm caught off guard by the emotion I feel: relief. Relief to not be them right now.

I missed this place—a lot—but I'm starting to question if I *actually* missed the *swimming* ...

Maybe I just missed doing something? Maybe I missed the location? Or worse, maybe I missed the *people?* —missed Andy and I shit talking early in the mornings, missed the team's debates on whether pineapple belongs on pizza or not, missed when Oliver's lip would tug every time I challenged him.

Maybe I missed when Coach would let his serious mask slip for a minute, and joke around with us. When Oliver is out of breath after a race, and his eyes flicked to me, no matter who was the more competitive competition, his eyes always found *me* .

My appreciation is cut short when I see Coach across the room talking to some of the freshman swimmers. I duck behind swimmers walking by, dropping my head low and angling my face away. I think I'd take my chances that Oliver would be more lenient than Coach.

Or maybe, a tiny voice in the back of my head thinks: Oliver might just be easier to *persuade* .

It's funny how quickly I picked up Oliver's schedule. I unconsciously learned it at the start of the year, when his presence was so insufferable to

be around , that I made an effort to not be around him for too long. To not hear everyone suck up to him and fawn over him.

It feels like a lot has changed since then, and I'm not exactly sure when it started.

I go to the locker room. I pass a few people in there, weaving through the lockers to where I figure Oliver is, right at the back where all the 'A squad' lockers are.

And there he is.

He's shuffling through his bag with his head hunched over and wet hair curling at the ends. His hair is darker damp, and his shirt is sticking slightly to his damp chest. He looks frustrated.

Maybe I would have tried to decipher it more, but seeing him sparks me in a mood.

I shove him into the wall. Roughly.

Oliver stumbles back into it, caught off guard. Surprised.

Was it unnecessary? *Probably* . Did I get satisfaction from it? *Yes* . Am I proving how bipolar I am to him? *Definitely* .

All I know is that I want his eyes on me, his body close to me, and I have an explainable feeling towards him. I pretend it's anger.

He blinks. I push him again so he is pressed up against the wall, and he lets me.

He lets me crowd his space, he lets me fist his shirt, he lets me hold him against the wall. He lets me get in his face.

He lets me.

And I know he is *letting* me do this—because he's stronger than me. He's proven it time over time that he can easily overpower me at any moment.

I've seen him swim. I've seen him at the gym. I'm not blind, I've seen his physique.

But he doesn't stop me.
And it confuses me and eggs me on.

His brows are furrowed. His skin smells like chlorine and he's still slightly damp from his swim session. The locker room is emptying now, the time everyone has finished up.

"Beau? What are doing here? You're not allowed to be here." His voice is more concerned than disciplinary.

I scoff, " *Really?* " the sarcasm is dripping from my voice.

God I'm a dick.

He grimaces when I push him further into the wall, but he doesn't stop me. " *Okay* ," he says, his voice measured. "Is there something you want from me?"

I let out a bitter laugh. "Want from you? I think you know what I *want* .."

He listens patiently, eyebrow arched in waiting, head tilted slightly to the side as he looks down at me.

"I want to *fucking* swim, Oliver. Tell coach to let me come back already—he listens to you!"

He sighs, a short release of annoyed air like he's talking to a child. "You have three more days, Beau."

"I want to swim. *Now* ." I know I sound like a child, a child demanding they get a toy they want. But his proximity is fucking with my brain and I can't find it in me to care.

"Suck it up," he bites back angrily.

I narrow my eyes and he sighs, running a hand down his face.

"Look," he says more gently. "Not everything in life has to be about swimming, alright. There's more to life than winning medals—" he rambles on, but I'm not really listening.

I mean, I'm looking at his lips—but I'm not interested in what words they are saying. It's probably some motivational inspiring shit that he's spewing, the team loves that crap. And I have no doubt it's *good* ... it just, I got my eyes on something better.
My mind on something better.

My hand holding his collar drags down his chest.

He pauses, cutting his speech off abruptly.

My hand drag down his chest slowing at the rim of his shorts. He catches my wrist before it can go any further.

"What are *you* .." He clears his throat. "What are doing?" There's a warning to his voice, an edge to it.

"I'm convincing the captain that it's in his best interest to let me swim.." My voice is more breathy than I'd like.

He makes a noise in the back of his throat. "No, you're not. You're not *fucking* doing that because you want to *fucking* swim again."

There's a flare in his—and not in the way I'd like—but in anger.

I've never heard Oliver swear so much, it's jarring, surprising, *hot* .

Except he doesn't put up much resistance when I pull my hand from his grasp, or when I slip my hand under his shorts. His hands fist my shirt, but not to push me away, but to stabilise himself.

He lets me...

In fact, when my hand wraps around his member, he slumps into the wall squeezing his eyes shut, leaning his head back on the wall. He says fuck under his breath.

I lean further into him. "Aren't you going to stop me?"

He makes an intelligible sound at the back of his throat. "Fuck you." he manages to grunt, his breathing uneven.

I grin, biting down on my bottom lip harshly.

He is putty beneath my hand, his breathing heavy and eyes lidded as he watches me stroke him. I grip him tighter. He moans, his head falling to my shoulder, his breathing rough.

His lips sloppily graze along my neck, and his hot breath brushing my skin makes me shiver. He feels hot and heavy. His uneven breaths sending pelts of hot heat through me.

"Let me swim," I breathe.

He groans. "This isn't *fucking* fair."

There it is again. His swearing. *Fuck* .

"Suck it up," I repeat his own words back to him.

He grunts, biting my neck. I yelp in shock, feeling his lazy smirk against my neck. He leans more of his weight on me. His breathing is hot on the junction between my shoulder and neck, lips wet as they graze my skins

His breathing is controlled by the pace of my hand, and I can't deny I like it.

It feels weird, to have control and power over someone who holds so much of it all the time. To have the man who is always collected and composed a moaning mess in my hand.

I slow down my hand and he makes a noise in the back of his throat.
" *Beau* ." It's a pained groan mixed heavily with desire.

"Let me swim."

He struggles for a few seconds, trying to not give in.

He grunts. "You're a little bitch, you know that."

I grin, stroking him slower.

"Fuck. *fine* . Whatever you want," he resigns with a rough breath.

And that's the answer I want, but not the *sound* I want.

I move my hand again, faster, forcing the sound out of him. He's panting now. And my shorts feel really tight.

His fingers loop into my jeans, pulling me harshly against him. His head lifted to look at me.

His eyes are darker now, eyes lidded and voice husky. "Your lucky, you know."

He makes it obvious that he's the taller one, that I have to tilt my head up to meet his eyes.

"Why's that?"

"Because you're the only one is can get away with this shit." He flips our positions. "But you're not the only one who can be convincing."

His hands slip under my shirt, pass spreading over my chest and fingers curling into my skin almost possessively. Heat pools in my lower stomach, my mind is hazy with desire.

He tugs my bottom lip into his mouth, biting down playfully. He gently pushes my back flat into the lockers and kisses down my neck, my adam apple, and my throat.

The locker room's door opens with a bang, it's a distinctive sound that is undoubtedly recognisable.

I jolt back, caught off-guard, banging my hand on the locker behind me with a thump in the process.

I wince, and it's not because of the pain.

Oliver grabs the back of my head with his hand frowning, smoothing the spot gently with his fingers.

We can't see who it is, because there are lockers used as a sort of wall, blocking our view of the door.

"Oliver, that you?" A thick French accent calls, a male voice.

The exchange student.

I grind my teeth, pushing off the lockers to leave. But a firm hand is pushing me back in place, isn't letting me.

An annoyed expression clouds Oliver's face and he clears his throat when the footsteps start to get closer. "Yeah, I'm here." His voice is raspy, a little lower than usual.

I push against his hand again, but he still doesn't let me leave.

Son of a bitch.

Before he let me, he let me, *he let me* —and now he *doesn't* let me.
He's the one in control now. He let me be in control, and he isn't afraid to show it.

"Good. Would you like to grab food? I saw this place near the College we could—"

"Can't sorry." Oliver interrupts, eyes meeting my annoyed expression, eyes glaring up at him.

Move , I mouth to him. Instead, he puts a hand between me and the direction of the exit, bracketing me in. He pushes his hips into mine, trapping me between him and the lockers.

I have to bite my lip to muffle my groan.

The footsteps get closer but Oliver hand and hips are still holding me in place. Hard.

"Alright, what about tomorrow? You can show me around the campus a bit maybe? There's this—"

"Yep. Sure. Whatever." he says rushed, eyes running over me hotly.

The footsteps stop. And I let out a small breath of relief, glad he's not going to walk around the lockers.

"Awesome, I'll talk to you about it at training tomorrow." He says too eagerly, and then he's walking back out the door.

Oliver's hand is already twining into my hair, manipulating my head to the side, tilting it to give him more skin as he drops his head to my neck, kissing a hot wet line.

It's hot. he's hot. But my stomach feels cold. The idea of him and the exchange student together made me cold.

I take out the feeling on him.
I think it's about time I return the favour of what he did to me at the last swim meet. Not because I'm trying to mark him or anything, just an eye for an eye *ya know* .

I bite and suck the skin along his neck, his collar, top of his chest. Teeth scrapping and hard, he doesn't complain though. No, he takes his shirt off and offers me better access to more skin.

Even after I've visibly bruised his skin, it doesn't satisfy the full of me. Doesn't rid all of that heavy anger in my chest.

I bet the exchange student is hot, he sounds hot. And I bet he's a lot nicer, and a better swimmer. Oliver couldn't really want more than this from me? He can do so much better, he must know that.

I don't want to just be another person who falls under Oliver's spell. So whatever this is, it has to be a one-time thing.

It leave me no choice but to hate Oliver. I have to. Hating him is so much easier than wanting more from him. Wanting something I could never have.

Hating him stops me from being delusional. Being hopeful. And hope is dangerous thing.

"We still hate each other, right?"

"M *mm* , sure," he murmurs distractedly, kissing my lips like he could never get bored of it.

"Like... a lot." I gasp out as his tongue runs over my skin, running over my throat and adam apple.

"Right," he hums, lips finding mine again.

Plush skin on skin creating delicious friction. I don't think I could ever get sick of his lips.

"Like—fucking *loathe* each other," I pant, saying between kisses when he allows me the chance to get air. Which isn't very much.

His teeth dug into the soft skin of my lip, tugging it into his mouth and I moan. He groans a deep throaty sound from the back of his throat in respond

"Yeah. Hate ya. Now take your shirt off." he demands, allowing some space between us so I can do so. His eyes anything but golden and pure.

I pull it over my head, my heart beating double time and lava pooled in my lower stomach.
"This doesn't change anything" I murmur, eyes appreciating his chest, his smooth skin, the hickeys I left

Oliver pauses a second, hands stilling on my chest. Eyes flaring. " *Fine* ," he grunts.

His hands find my zipper and my head lolls back into the lockers. In no time I'm moaning again.

But no matter how hard I try, right now—in this moment, I *really* don't hate Oliver. No one bit. Not at all.

****

Author Note:

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. It's starting to heat up, I'm exciting for the next part. I would've liked to edit this a bit more, but it's been awhile so I thought I wouldn't keep u waiting any longer.

Also you guys are pretty cool. I've been totally surprised and caught off guard but the support I have been given for the story. Every nice comment means the world. I did not expect this when I started writing this story. I just had a scene in my head and couldn't find a story that was one I like it. One that had the elements I wanted. I wanted a story of hate, one when you hate someone so much because of how perfect they seem and how inferior you feel. So I wrote it, and turns out some other people like it too, which is really cool.

I usually write when the creativity flows to me, but you guys force me to chase and tackle it, and force it to stay with me haha. Also, guys, my favourite Author on here is following me back. And I think I'd die If she read my books.

Anyway, have a good rest of your day and vote if you want the next chapter ❤
Love y'all

Chapter 17

I turn up to training the next day with an almost skip in my step and as close to a smile as I can get to. Except I don't skip and I rarely smile.

But I was close.

Very close.

I attract some looks as I walk in. I don't usually like attention, but today, today I don't mind.

The squad is still in their clothing chatting around Coach. My eyes instantly find Oliver due to his sandy mop of hair above everyone else's. Time almost passes in slow motion, there are a few shocked looks, gasps, eyes widening. Ryan looks annoyed and Andy is grinning nodding his head and the rest of the team looks confused as fuck. I try not to be as smug as I feel.

I fail.

I nearly have a skip in my step, and I have to forcibly chill myself down so I don't look like a little kid running toward the toy section.

Coache's voice makes times catch up to real-time. "What the hell are you doing here Beau?" His deep voice calls, an unimpressed brow raised with my 'I'm the guy' walk.

I grin, teeth and all. "Oliver let me come back early, Coach."

Yep, I did that. I put full blame on Oliver and attention off of me and onto our captain. You're welcome.

Coach swivels his head to Oliver who is grumbling incoherent words under his breath.

"This right, Oliver?"

I speak up before Oliver can. "Yep, I was on good behaviour," I say, offering my most innocent grin.

Coach snorts at that, looking like he doesn't believe it, and gives Oliver an expectant look, waiting for his response.

Oliver grunts, crossing his arms over his chest begrudgingly, avoiding Coach's eye. "Yes." he sighs. "I said he could come back," Oliver admits reluctantly.

Coach looks surprised, another glance and a pregnant pause before he nods slowly. "Alright then, I trust your opinion."

Coach fixes me with a stern look. "But behave, kid, alright?"

I nod, a grin coming to face as I salute him sarcastically. "On my best behaviour sir." I'm probably pushing the line.. okay I definitely am—but I'm in a good mood today.

Coach rolls his eyes, but I see the way the corner of his mouth tugs. He doesn't say it, but he missed me.

He claps his hands together, "Alright right team, let's get back to it. Get changed and then everyone poolside ready for warm up and some basic drills. We are going to some timed races."

Everyone groans aloud.

Timed sprints are crucial to getting in Coach's good books. To see where you sit in the group. I'm not usually nervous, but something heavy sits in my stomach today at the thought of it. Not the most ideal way for me to start training again after a break. I'm at a disadvantage, because while I have been on timeout, everyone else has been swimming every day and getting better. That thought makes my me feel queasy.

What's worse though, is that coach called me over before I got in the changing rooms to tell me that I shouldn't worry about how behind I am, that it is okay if my times aren't my best since I have been off. It's *insulting* .

I've never been a middle-of-the-pack swimmer and I ain't about to start now. Yes, I'm behind and a little out of training.. but knowing me, I'll swim until I pass out if it meant proving myself, (that isn't a smart idea though, and I do not suggest).

When I get into the changing room, my mood has dampened thanks to Coaches lack of faith in me. The fire to do well burning even hotter. Nationals is soon, too soon. Has Coach lost hope in me? Does he think I won't be good by then?

Andy slaps my back affectionately, drawing me out of my head. "Thank fuck you're back. You're an ass, but Ryan is *insufferable,* he's been coming second too much at training and it's getting to his head."

"HEY!" Ryan exclaims, narrowing his eyes at Andy.

Andy shrugs unapologetically.

"Don't get comfortable" I wink at Ryan, starting to undress.

Ryan scoffs. "Trust me, I'm not. Not with that exchange student here."

That piques my interest. My eyes follow Ryans to Oliver's locker, where the new exchange student is talking animatedly to Oliver.

Ryan sounds smug when he speaks again, "Seems like you got some more competition now."

I pretend to look around. " *Where?* "

Andy barks out a laugh and Ryan rolls his eyes suppressing his smile. "You're one cocky little shit, Beau." He shakes his head. "But for once, I'm actually glad you're here, that new exchange student has been hogging Coach's attention and sucking up to Oliver for too long. It's time for him to be taken down a notch."

I glance at Oliver and the exchange student again. Oliver laughs at something he says, and it's the best fucking sound. A deep laugh, one that reverberates through my skin.

I wish that it was me making him laugh.

Oliver turns his head a little and I quickly divert my head and gaze, avoiding all chances for eyes to catch his.

I haven't faced him since the other day. Talked to him since his hand was around my dick and my lips to his skin. I flush further, repelling all those images out of my mind, because I'm in my swimwear and now is not the time for those thoughts.

My body feels jittery and nervous, the cold air brings goosebumps to my skin as we make our way out to the pool.

Why did I want to come back here earlier? I change my mind. My bed was really warm this morning, and I'd like to go back there.

I shake my arms out a little, mentally preparing myself for the cold water I am about to emerge myself in.

Andy is beside me, dipping his cap in water before putting it over his head. "How the shit did you convince Oliver to let you back?" He asks.

"I used my charm."

That makes Andy laugh. No—not just laugh— but fold over slapping his leg as if he heard the most hilarious joke in the world. "You? Charm. Ha! Good one." he says between laughs.

I don't say anything else and Andy quietens down, his amused smile fading. "Yourserious?"

I nod, an annoyed scowl on my lips.

He snorts, as if he is amused by the thought. "No, really, what did you do Beau? Threaten Oliver with something? Find some dirt on him? Though I doubt the guy has dirt on him."

I huff. "I can be charming."

"Beau, you don't smile unless it's about swimming. Nice isn't in your vocabulary. You're basically like a baby rhino, all cute and angry but not cuddly. Cuddle the rhino and he will stab the shit out of you with his horn thingie."

Now it's my turn to snort. "I'm not a fucking *baby rhino* ."

But Andy isn't having it. "And whoever tries to pat that baby rhino, is a brave brave person."

I give him a dry look, but his eyes aren't on me anymore, they have fallen on something over my shoulder. Andy's eyes widen a fraction before his jaw drops. "Holy shit."

Piped interest, I turn around and follow his gaze...

My eyes land on Oliver walking out of the changing rooms.

Everyone with eyes, and attracted to guys, looks at Oliver when he's shirtless. It's a given. We are only human. He's just... really nice to look at. But this time—it's everyone looking at his chest for another reason...

Holy fuck.

This time, I'm not the one with the love bites on my neck and chest. *He is.*

And I'm a tomato. A red fucking tomato.

Because I did that.

I remember the other day clearly. Vividly. Ingrained in my brain.

I remember bruising his skin, punishing him. Taking out my anger and sexual frustration on him. But he didn't stop me. He let me.

A part of me feels smug, that it's payback for when he did that to me. The other part is mortified by what I did and no doubt look flushed.

The exchange student eyed Oliver's chest with an obvious frown and displeasure. Tiffany looks jealous, and just everyone else is jaw-slacked shocked. That Oliver Folwer, the guy who has a reputation for rarely ever hooking up with anyone—is covered in hickeys. Has been marked. A person's claim on him basically.

I got to give it to him though, he doesn't look like he cares. He must feel the stares, the shocked looks, but if he does, he doesn't show it. He's not embarrassed or ashamed. He owns it.

It's kinda... *hot* .

And frustrating.

Why does it feel like Oliver *always* wins? He can be in a losing situation, yet he always comes out like he's winning. How is that?

When the tables were turned, and I was the one covered in hickeys, I didn't feel like a winner. I felt like someone's property, and I felt embarrassed. But Oliver doesn't. He's carrying on as if it is a normal day, and not giving a fuck about it.

It reminds me of the one race I bested Oliver in at College.

It was near the start of the year. It was a while ago, it should be hard to remember, but I remember it. Of course, I remember it. I was elated, ecstatic that I won. It was a seconds difference—but I still won. And when I got out of the pool, ready to gloat the shit out of it, Oliver congratulated me. He slapped my back and told me I did a good job. And I waited for it, looked for it, for the moment Oliver would kick himself for not winning. Would give himself a tough time and get frustrated. The moment his face would twist in any expression except for contentment.

It never came.

The win didn't feel so great when Oliver didn't treat himself like the loser. The win didn't feel as sweet when he didn't make himself suffer—not like I do. He just shrugged and moved on, like he *didn't even care* . Like it wasn't

even a big deal. Like losing didn't mean anything. Didn't take anything away from him.

And maybe it didn't?

Maybe his Father still goes to his competitions— *even* if he loses. Mine didn't. If I lost a race, he didn't come to any of my races for at least 8 months. But if I won, he had a higher likelihood of going to my races. If I won, he would give me a hug, he would smile and he would look proud walking next to me. He would ruffle my hair affectionately and we would go out for food. If I lost, he would be on his phone texting some work guy and I would have to compete with a screen for his attention. And the day I learned that, what winning meant, that was the day I started to see swimming differently. It's never been the same since.

But Oliver's not like that...

Maybe it's a mindset?

It must be the mindset if Oliver and I are put in the same situation, yet have different reactions and outcomes... We treat ourselves differently.

Oliver catches my eye and something flickers in it. He looks like he wants to come over, but he thinks better of it and walks to the edge of the pool instead.

Andy fixes me with a look, "Charm huh? That's not fucking charming Beau, that's making Oliver your goddamn chew toy."

I splutter, nearly choking on my saliva. "That's *not* .. I *didn't* .." I can't get the words out, I'm dying here. I don't know how Andy knows it was me, but I don't like it.

Andy shakes his head, the corner of his lip tugging. "Maybe someone can get close enough to the baby rhino, huh?" He clicks his tongue, " And who would've thought it would be the adored fluffy golden retriever."

Chapter 18

The warm-up is tough, a break from swimming has had more effect on my fitness than I thought it would. But I try really fucking hard to not let it show. To not show how much I'm puffing and how tired I already feel.

This isn't good, I'm dying and we ain't even half way through the session.

It's good to be back in the water, but I'm not enjoying it as much as I hoped, my mind occupied and fretting about the timed trials. Plus I'm distracted with how much Croissant talks to Oliver in the breaks.

I watched Croissant swim, yeah his name is not actually that and I'm a dick for calling him that in my head, it's stereotypical and lame, but I really don't like the guy. And Croissant is the nicest nickname I had in my head for him *so ...*

The point is, he's good. Better than I'd like to admit.

Oliver tries to catch my eyes, I know it because I can feel the heat of his stare and Coach spews out the next instructions. But every time that heavy heat of his gaze settles on me, I'm suddenly very interested in the water.

Look at this water between my fingers. It's so nice and watery.

Watery? What the fuck?

I run a hand down my face, cringing at myself and feeling really stupid. I've been careful to not get too close to Oliver, at least I thought I did... But now I'm confused where we are at. I liked what we did. A lot. But I'm not in the business of letting people get close to me, and Oliver has gotten close enough.

Closer than anyone else.

What happens when he realises I'm not worth it? I'd rather not stick around for that part. So I ignore him. Pretend I'm really focused on my swimming, which I am. So I ignored the looks and nodded my head and took his comments without a bite. Probably the most tame and obedient I have been at training involving him telling me what to do. And for some reason he finds a lot of critiques on me today, more than usual.

But I underestimated him, I let my guard down. I wasn't expecting the ambush, at least not while I was getting up to go get a drink from my drink bottle at the stands.

"Beau, a word," Oliver grunts.

My eyes widen and I look for an escape. Oliver arches a brow and waits for me to resign.

I huff dropping my shoulders, dragging my feet over to him like a child in trouble. I refuse to meet his eyes. I can't meet his eyes. Unsure how to deal with the man who's seen so much of me. Basically seen me naked now. I turn red.

"Look at me."

I don't.

He hooks a finger under my chin and forces my head up, forcing my reluctant eyes to raise before dropping it. Oliver stands so his back is towards the swimmers, his large forming hiding me. To anyone on the outside, it looks like we are having a conversation, maybe Oliver bossing me around or some shit, It wouldn't be anything new.

"Why won't you look at me?"

I don't know what to say to that. Isn't that how this was supposed to work? Things go back to normal after our steamy session in the locker room. We go back to rivals, nothing more.

Right?

Oliver shakes his head, annoyed. "You just going to ignore what happened the other day?"

"..no.. yes.. I don't know?" I stumble over my words, eyes looking everywhere on his face except his eyes.

He grunts. "Maybe I would believe that—if you didn't stake your *fucking* claim on me." He spreads his arms out, exposing the art of bruises I did to his chest. I try not to flush further. "You made these hickeys visible— *more* than visible." He laughs darkly. "Everyone saw, just like you wanted them to. You want your mark on me? Stake your claim? *Fine* . Take it. Have it."

He leans closer now, close enough that his breath brushes my nose as he stares me down. "But if you take it... know the consequences," He states, voice low and angry. He turns and stalks off.

Cool and level-headed Oliver *pissed* .

I'm hit with the reality I was hiding from myself. *He's right* , I did mark him. I marked him right where it would be seen, impossible for people to not see, I made it obvious. Visible.

What the fuck was I thinking? It wasn't just a few innocent marks, but almost possessive marks. Like I was sending a message to people.

I rake a hand through my hair, questioning why I took it that far. Why seeing everyone look at the hickeys on with flickers of jealousy in their eyes at their all-adored captain, makes me not mad.

Maybe I wanted people to see it? To know my lips had him? Maybe I wanting a piece of him to myself? He's so perfect, so good, maybe I wanted some of that for myself? Some of his sunshine and warmth for me.

I'm conflicted, confused... Because this feeling that I feel for him, about him, I have called it hate... I think it's a little *off* .

Hate isn't supposed to make you feel gooey inside. Hate isn't supposed to make your cheeks red and awaken every nerve in your body. Hate isn't

supposed to make you give them possessive hickeys over their body.

Hate doesn't feel like this, I should know, I feel full hate towards Josh. And this 'hate' I feel for Oliver, is a very *very* different feeling.

Croissant is all up on Oliver, chatting to him and playfully nudging him as soon as he is at the pool. A not-so-nice feeling stirs in my stomach. But a fraction of that feeling is eased, because while Croissant may be talking and being all friendly with him, *I'm* the one who had my tongue in his mouth and teeth to his lips. The one who has his love bites on his skin.

Yep, I think I need to re-check the dictionary definition of hate, because I'm pretty sure this feeling I hold towards Oliver, it ain't hate.

At least not anymore.

My mind's a little hazy as I make my way back to the pool. I take my cap off and ruffle my hair a bit before fixing it. Oliver's words are going through my head as I stare at the water, lost in thought.

You want your mark on me? Stake your claim? Fine. Take it. Have it. But if you take it... know the consequences.

My brows furrow. What's the consequences?

The rest of the swim session goes as usual. I'm breathing a little harder than normal, feeling a little more tired, and body feeling heavier than usual.

The time for the timed sprints comes too soon, and Coach gets us all out of the water and is going to race us in pairs.

My mind is still wrapped up in Oliver's words, trying to decipher what these consequences mean. But what I did get from that talk is that Oliver doesn't want me to avoid looking at him.

And if he wants me to look at him, oh I'll look at him. And I do, taking in all the damage I did.

The junction between his neck and shoulder has a splotchy red near the purple spot. There's another one under the corner of his defined jaw, light enough that you only see it if you are looking hard. Another two along his collar and one on his smooth chest. My stomach tightens at the memory of how he got them. What sounds he made when I gave them to him.

Oliver squirms a little under my gaze, one would only notice if paying close attention, which I am. Is... his cheeks a little redder?

But then Croissant steals his attention and I clench my fists, diverting my gaze back to Coach.

"Alright, who's first?" Coach calls.

"Croissant, you and me," I grunt, walking to the diving board. He frowns at the name, I know I'm being a dick.

I'm not usually this much of a dick. Or maybe I am? But I'm confused right now, my emotions all over the place. And while being a dick doesn't make me feel any better, maybe if I win this race I will?

Actually, I know for a fact that beating him will *definitely* make me feel better.

***

I lose. *Bad.*

Butt—fucking—kicked.

Ass handed to me.

Dust ate.

It was obvious loss—by only a few seconds, but seconds mean *everything* in swimming.

The sting of the loss is raw and fresh, I can't help wincing, feeling it ring right through me to my chest. A feeling similar to the one I feel every time Dad watches and I don't win. It's usually not as bad at training, but today it feels just as heavy today, like someone important that I wanted to impress was watching the race..

I get this heavy feeling when I lose against Oliver too, but it's not as intense, it's a significantly more watered-down feeling with him, and that realisation surprises me. I wonder why that is? Why is losing to Oliver not as bad as losing to anybody else?

I pull myself out of the water with a huff, my body hating myself right now. It got comfortable with the break, and it is not liking this sudden exertion.

Croissant is smug about his obvious win, unbashfully grinning as he gets out of the pool. And fair- *fucking*- enough. I know I would have been if I did. Hell, I would have probably been worse. He sends me a cocky look and I'm too annoyed at myself to even glare back at him.

I was shit. My body felt like lead and my movements were sloppy. I don't think I have swam that bad in a long time. I shouldn't be that bad, I haven't been off for that long? What is with me today?

A second wave of embarrassment and hurts hits at the awareness that Coach saw that, the squad saw that, *Oliver* saw that.

Coach slaps my back when I pass him. "Don't beat yourself up kid, you've been on break."

I grit my teeth, my jaws clamped so tight it's starting to give me a headache.

Beat myself up?

Ha, I'm in a war with myself. Feeling as low as dirt, pride in the trenches, bullets to the confidence.

Croissant grins up at Oliver, as if expecting a congratulations, but Oliver's eyes aren't on him. Lips downturned and attention unfortunately on me.

The rest of the timed sprints couldn't go quick enough. It's funny how I wanted to come back to swimming so bad, and now it's the last place I want to be. The session drags slow, and I watch everyone race, not really paying attention though. Andy tries to cheer me up, and I appreciate it, but it does little to settle the pit in my stomach. Oliver obviously wins his race, getting the best time, and of course Croissant is the first to congratulate him. I try not to roll my eyes.

We are soon dismissed and I feel like a zombie going through the routine motions. I can't wait to get back to my dorm and crash. Sleep has never looked so good.

Except that isn't exactly the plan—because Oliver grabs my arm as I walk out of the locker room, holding me back. I was the one of the last ones out of the changing rooms so it only takes a few minutes before everyone has left the building. All of theme going back home for dinner, going to their beds, and Olivers holding me hostage here. But his eyes warning enough for me to not protest and put up a fight.

"Don't," he grunts, visibly annoyed.

"Don't what?" I huff, annoyed by this demanding man.

"Don't *fucking* be like that. I know what you are thinking, and stop it, right now."

"You don't know shit," I scoff tiredly trying to break my arm free, the usual fire to my words lacking a little.

His grip tightens.

"You lost, *so what* ?"

I wince. I hate that word.

"If you measure your happiness on winning a race Beau, on *beating* me and others; your happiness is never going to be consistent." He expresses, eyes searching my own.

"I *don't* .." I scrub a hand down my face. "I *can't* .. I'm trying to..." my voice dies off, a little lost and confused.

Does he want me to stop trying to win? To stop caring about winning? How can you ever be great if you don't want it bad enough though?

I tilt my head to the side, looking up at him. "You want me to stop caring?"

He shakes his head. "No. Fuck no. Your drive and determination is.. good— *really* good." he finally says, face softening a little. "I'm telling you to stop putting so much weight on yourself, to not let one outcome control you so much."

I scoff. "And how the *fuck* do you suppose I do that?" I exclaim frustratedly, voice raised, hand tugging the ends of my hair roughly. "Tell me Oliver, how the fuck am I going feel good if I am no good? I don't get it?"

He steps in, hands cradling my face as he stares down at me. Blue eyes so bright and so full, I forever swim in their warmth.
"You love yourself anyway."

Silence.

Hot white painstaking silence.

"You swam shit, didn't perform your best— *love yourself anyway* ."

I shake my head, not wanting to deal with his sappy shit, but his hold on my arm forces me to stay.

"You didn't get the results you wanted— *love yourself anyway* ." His voice is demanding, eyes frustrated.

"You came *butt fuck last* ...

Love.

yourself.

anyway."

There's a determination in his eyes, one that I am familiar with, and when he gets it, he never loses. "You starting to get it now?" He asks, a slight strain in his voice. "Is it getting to your head?"

I swallow and he sighs.

"Love isn't something you have to earn, Beau, it's something everyone needs and deserves; and I think it's about time you start letting yourself have it, from others and *yourself* ."

What is this, therapy? I'm fine. I never, I well I, didn't think I had a problem with self love... I guess I never thought about it. I've heard all that bullshit before and I've never really paid much attention to it. What difference could it make?

But If I think back now, *really* think, the times when I actually liked myself most was when I was on the podium in the first place. And that rings the question, am I supposed to like myself more than a handful of times? Could I even like myself even when others don't and I don't have the success to deserve it?

He leans forwards and so gently it almost hurts, he places a soft kiss to my forehead and murmurs, "Think about it." Then he leaves.

Leaves me with a weird feeling in my chest and more questions then answers.

Fuck I really hate this guy, (and I think we have established my definition of hate is a little off).

Chapter 19

A few weeks have passed, (three to be exact), And things are alright. Maybe even good, but say good and you got something to lose. And having something to lose.. now thats *dangerous stuff* .

But things are alright. *Really* alright.

I still go to bed late—but less late. An hour earlier actually. My class participation has been the highest it's been so far, (still not that good though). I'm eating better, thinking more about food that's going to give more energy so I can swim better. Even some green shit in there.

Coincidence.

I'v started bringing lunches to campus, a drink bottle too. I'm ignoring my Fathers messages because I know it will make a pit in my stomach so much bigger and so much more consuming. I taking some vitamin crap that is 'supposed' to make your ion and immunity good.

Coincidence.

So what if I'm being a semi-goodboy? I can be not-toxic and self-sabotaging... *Sometimes.*

Jokes on him, Oliver and his stupid words didn't affect. Of course not. Pfff. Whatever. I just decided that I should probably get my shit together before nationals. And I decided, that maybe, if I want to be as good as I want to be, I need to start treating myself as something good. As someone who *deserves* good.

Who knew it would just take so much damn discipline. Like a constant nagging parent in your head. It's exhausted. But my shoulders feel a little lighter and body doesn't feel like a fucking zombie. All these coincidences have been making me feel better. I have never felt so... in control. Like, I have some semblance of control over my life and future, and maybe, just

maybe, I can handle this all. Like maybe if I lose at nationals for swimming, (which it is looking that way), it will be alright.

The world won't end.

The sun will keep on rising.

Andy will still be a virgin.

Different but the same. Its going to be just fine. Things will be okay, I've decided. *I* will be okay. Maybe I'll have a bruised ego and be in a sour mood for a day or two—but I'll survive. I still have good things going for me, and good things that will happen that I can't even see yet.

So I've started trying to take the other parts of my life a bit more seriously, like study. I even talked to someone in class the other day. It was just to ask him for a pen, it wasn't really to even talk to the guy, I just forgot my pen. (Not that I actually took notes, just doodled).

Anyway, the guy took that as an opening to talk my ear off for the rest of class. So now we sit next to each other in class. It's cool. Whatever. He talks too much, and sometimes I regret initiating conversation. Other times we go to the campus coffee shop and study together, or at least say we are going to.

Swimming is swimming, I guess. With nationals looming, coach has been riding our arses. And I've been keeping my head down and doing the work. The morning training aren't as shit, when I actually get more than 4 hours of sleep. Funny that.

And Oliver...

We're fine.

Alright .

Sometimes (most times), I'm the last one to finish dressing in the changing rooms. And Oliver is too.

Coincidence.

And somehow our lips find each other when everyones gone—and his hand in my pants. I'm not complaining. Nope. I give it right back tenfold, and Oliver takes it all with a grin on his lips and a spark in his eyes.

Nationals in is one week. I haven't said I was nervous, or alittle stressed about it, but Oliver suggested we get some extra swim sessions together at night. So we do that sometimes, swim lengths, race each other, kiss against the side of the pool for way too long and not nearly long enough.

He presses me back against the cool tiled wall of the pool, but makes up for it by pushing his warm body into mine. Muscle against muscle, breath against breath. Heart beating against mine.

I try not to think about it too hard, that I'm fooling around with the captain behind closed doors. I just get lost in the moment, lost with my hands in Oliver's impossibly soft hair and lips lost on him.

But fuck, the more I have him—the more I want him.

***

It's Thursday afternoon, and I'm walking across campus from one of my classes I actually went to for the first time instead of watching the re-play. Not going to lie, total waste of my time and I so could have watched that from my comfortable bed at 2x the speed.

It's hot. Hot enough that the pool is crowded with uni students want a swim. And I don't like people, so I'm heading to the cafe down the street with the least amount of people.

But seems I'm not the only one, because at the counter is Quinn, Olivers crazy psychotic ex-girlfriend who once accidentally locked us in a room at a swim meet because she's crazy. But she's intimidatingly gorgeous and a good swimmer.

I try not to groan when she spots me.

"Well, well, if it isn't Olivers play-toy."

I smile back venomously. "Jealous?"

Obviously I know what she is say is bullshit, but it's worth it for the reaction it elicits. She glares, lip curling. Girl had it hard for him. Maybe still does? I hope not though—for her sake.

"Oliver was a shit boyfriend anyway." She scoffs, inspecting her nails. "You can have him. I don't care anymore."

My eyebrows shoot up at her words.

Oliver? a bad boyfriend?

Really?

Oliver seems like perfect boyfriend material. Like—he seems like he would be a *really* good boyfriend. He's kind, thoughtful, emotionally intelligent, hot, has like a really nice smile, easy going, did I mention hot?

He's basically the full package.

She sees my surprise and huffs, and decides to further expand, "He wasn't affectionate enough, and my love language is touch. And he wasn't around enough, always busy," she shrugs.

Now my brows bunch. Busy, I get. He's got a lot on with his study, captain and other dumb volunteer stuff he does.

But *not affectionate enough?* Are we talking about the same guy?

The Oliver who kisses my forehead. Who has cuddled in bed with me like a fucking Kuala. Who steals any chance he can at training to graze his skin along mine.

This doesn't sound like the Oliver I know. The overly touchy—gets in your business—invested, guy. I swear the guy has kissed my forehead more than my Mum has. Hugged me more than my Dad has, which isn't hard to beat I guess.

"Huh.." I say distantly, plopping down on a seat.

Qinn follows suit, situating herself opposite me with her large coffee cupped in her hands. Inviting herself to sit with me I guess.

"You going to the party tonight?" she asks, changing conversation suddenly.

I nod cautiously.

This time, for maybe the first time, I'm not even going for the drinks. I just know a certain golden boy is going to be there, and I'd really like to put my lips back on his. Asap.

But I'm, ah, nervous to be in a room alone with him., so party where heaps of people are there is it. I'm still new to this whole guy intimate thing, and not really sure what the fuck I'm doing to be honest. So I've been playing it safe, safe things in places where things can only go so far..

Quinn rats her nails against the table. "Guess I'll see you there then."

Realisation kicks in, and my brows draw. "what the hell are you doing here? You don't even go to school here?"

She shrugs, looking away, cheeks flushing slightly. "Scouting the competition."

"Bullshit."

She rolls her eyes. "Fine. A boy."

Ah, a boy...

"Who's the poor fella? Do I need to give him a warning you're kind of crazy?" I joke, sort of.

She rolls her eyes again, scoffing. "At least I don't sweet talk the coach into getting him to swim for my team."

Huh..

"What, you really think you were good enough to be on scholarship for the best swimming schools squad in the country? Ha. Maybe now you are, but back then you weren't." She shrugs. "You were good, but not— *full scholarship* —good. So who do you think vouched for you? Who do you think convinced coach to give poor little ol'e Beau a chance."

I shake my head, trying to sort through what she's implying.

She continues, "Oliver. *Duh* ," she deadpans. She shrugs, "guess he chose well, you earned your spot, sort of, but you didn't deserve it to begin with. Guess he just had the hots for you to begin with it." She eyes me up and down. "took him long enough to get you."

It feels like a brick has dropped on my brain, and I don't know how to feel about it.

Oliver's the reason I'm swimming here?

****

Authors Note:

Totally understand if know one is reading this story anymore cause I update so late. Algs, I'd probs do the same. But if you're still here... thats cool. *You're* cool.

The reason I take so long to write is cause I don't have a plan when I write this, I literally just free style it. I decided to try write stories where I actually plan at the start of this year, and it's a lot more fun and easy, so been hard to write this story when I'm so invested in the other ones. Plus last year of Uni so super busy—and been devoting all

my rare spare time to my other stories that I'm writing, not gonna lie. And this story is the one of my first stories I've tried, and I just think my other ones are a lot better. Anyway, this story will be done soon hopefully. And better things to come hopefully.

Take it easy one me, I had a meltdown yesterday cause I be vry stressed. So a reminder from me and Beau, to treat yourself like you *deserve* good. Be gentle with yourself and remember it's not the end of the world if everything doesn't go to plan.

Have a good day lovelies xx

Chapter 20

Musics loud, mind even louder. Drunk people are really dumb, the flat is a disgusting mess, and I'm struggling to remember why I liked going to these? Guess sober brain works differently.

The swim team are, enjoying themselves, but no ones drinking. At least not a lot—not with Nationals next week. Even I am keeping my distance. I have purposefully positioned myself across the room far away from the beverages, anything to help me behave, no matter how much I want a drink.

If this were a couple of weeks ago, I would have drunk until I drowned. Tried find comfort in the bottom of a bottle.

But things are different now.

I'm actually not quite sure why I'm here, to be honest. Why come to a party if not to drink? To have fun? But fun without drinking? Or am I here to glare at Oliver across the room all night? To ignore him? Or do I want to confront him? Make him pay? *Kiss* him?

I slam my plastic cup of water on the table a little too hard that his sprays my hand. Here I am sipping water like an idiot, waiting for one guy. He didn't even want to go to this party, asked me after training the other day if I wanted to go out with him, but this was before I talked with Quinn.

Before I learnt the truth.

Finger twirled in my curl, tugging it playfully. "You swam good today" he grins down at me, right after training the other day.

I tilt my chin up, trying not to show the flutter in my chest. "I know."

He rolls his eyes at my response. "and humble."

We're in the locker room, just us. Damp after our swim session. And he's right, I did swim good. Not enough to beat him, but close. Even had Croissant eating my dust.

"Why don't we go out somewhere Friday? Somewhere different..." he says.

Like a date? is what I want to ask, but don't.

"It's Sophie's flat party tonight."

He nuzzles his nose into my neck playfully. "we don't have to go, we could go back to mine. Do something else instead.."

My stomach flips, a heat and nervousness in my body. But something else as well.. a lava in my lower stomach. "Lets show face at the party, then we can go back to yours?"

He presses a kiss to the space between neck and collar, "whatever you want, darling. You call the shots."

And I liked that. I call the shots.

So what shot am I going to call now?

The party's food is shit, only chicken chips left and no damn dip. Everyone looks to be having a ball of time, while I sulk in the corner of the room. Being sober at a party is a new thing for me, but fuck if I aint proud of how I have resisted it. How well I have avoided the thing that used to be my crutch. But I care more about my body now, about giving it the best chance of performance. I want to make life easier for future me. And so far—that has been working out for me, so I'll see how long I can stick with it. See how long giving a little shit about myself makes shit easier.

When Oliver arrives I'm on the opposite side of the room. It's obvious when he arrives, people going out their was to say hi to him. To talk to him. To keep his *attention* .

Good.

I don't want to see his handsome face and let my anger and humiliation get distracted. I'm pissed—and *rightly* so.

Swimming has been my identity for so long (and still is part of it), and finding this truth out *really* sucks. That I didn't earn my spot like the rest.

My motivation for nationals depleted. What's the point, I must not have a chance if I wasn't even good enough to get into the squad without Olivers influence? That I have to get my boyfrie— *woah* ...

backup .

Where the fuck did that word come *from???*

There's been no labels thrown out for the last 2 weeks of me and Oliver fooling around. I don't even know what to call it? Makeout buddies? I don't know if he doesn't want a relationship, or if he doesn't want to scare me off.

I distract myself in the conversation I'm supposed to be part of, ignore my minds muckup. It took me a week to figure it out, but my new friends name from in law class, Daniel. Don't know how he knows Sophie or whoever he's connected to to come to this party, but he's here. He's been rambling on about one of our class assignments and how dumb the teacher

was for giving him a C when it was an 'A effort' apparently.

I can't help but snort at that.

"I bring multiple pens to class! 3 pens, just incase one breaks and then another!"

"and that deserves you an A?" I question.

He narrows his gaze, pointing a finger at me, "if you want to keep on using my third pen, you better shut your mouth."

I lift my hands up in surrender biting my lip to surpress my smile. It's true, I fully rely on Daniel to bring pens to class that I never bring any. And he always does. Not that I write much notes, but I've been trying lately.

A few other people come over and start conversation, I'm not really paying attention, just nodding and humming where appropriate, pretending I'm not waiting for the moment Oliver notices me.

And when he does... I know.

My whole body goes electric when his eyes are on me. Hairs standing on needs and a tingly sensation zapping through me.

I can feel him trying to catch my eye. Ignoring whoever is talking to him and keeping his eyes firmly in me. Stubbornly persistent.

I ignore it, pretending not to notice his presence. Oh what a thing to ignore the eyes of the person who has all eyes on them. I wonder if it drives him insane? That someones not giving him the attention he's usually given so freely. Given so often and so diligently.

I bet it drives him insane.

A familiar sandy haired boy draws my eyes. Slumped on the orange couch looking depressed is none other than Andy. A sour look on his face with a beer grasped too tightly in his fist.

Is he.. *sulking* ?

A rare sight to see. Kids always painfully positive.

I follow his line of gaze, my eyes landing on..

Quinn?

She's dancing with the abundle student has have started to form dance party in the middle of the lounge. She's good, her body flows in sink with the music, a sexualness oozing off of her. She looks carefree, like a whole different person from the uptight one I've encountered.

She's dancing off a guy, making him look like a doofus on the dance floor who has no idea who to keep up with her. But it's not her dancing or change in demeanor thats got my brows rising. It's her *eyes* .

Eyes looking right back across the floor near, if not exactly, on a very down guy on the orange couch.

My head swings between them. Confused. Interested.

The Bitch and Babi. *No fucking way.*

She's looking at Andy while she's dancing with that guy. And Andy is looking fucking miserable on that couch, poor guy. She grinds on the guy, but her eyes are on Andy's. Her bottom lip trapped under her lip sensually.

This is too much.

I turn away running a hand over my face, fuck. This shit is weird. I need a drink.

But I bump into a hard firm body, my water spilling over the guys white shirt. "—shit, I'm sorr.." I die off, because the guy I spilled his drink over is none other than Oliver.

Suddenly not feeling as sorry anymore. Should I chuck the remains of my water in my cup on him?

But he's wet. Wearing a white shirt. And its see thoroughness is distracting my anger. My humiliation at not earning my spot on the team. Because a soaked shirt looks really good on him, (no shirt looks better though).

Focus Beau.

"Didn't pick you for so clumsy," Oliver teases, no anger or annoyance in his voice, instead his mouth is tugged into a more friendly face. A welcoming warmth to him that I could never replicate.

"Didn't pick you to be blind," I retort pettily, my coldness a total juxtaposition to his warmth.

A flash of surprise crosses his face, maybe at my hostility towards him, he's been melting me recently, so probably off guard at my sudden change in attitude.

"Guess you'll have to help me find a new shirt then, since I'm blind and all, "he grunts, grabs my shirt and hauls me out of the room, down the hallway and into a room. It seems Oliver knows his way around this flat.

He turns to face me, arms crossed, lower half of shirts sticking to his abs. "Alright, let's skip the shit where you are cold and snappy for fucking ever, and get whatever has you pissed at me off your chest."

My eyes snap back to his, caught. "Who says I'm mad? Maybe I'm always like this?" I say defensively.

"Because I know you."

My skin heats and I tug on my shorts collar. Not sure how to respond to that, I shift on my feet wishing I wasn't so sober right now.

I release a breath, eyeing him, watching his reactions carefully. "I know what you did."

"Care to enlighten me on what that is?" he asks patiently.

I decide to give it to him straight. "You're the reason I'm on this team, right? Why I got the scholarship?"

His brows shoot up.

"You influenced coach. Avocaded for me, cause you liked me? Wanted to beat me? I don't know. Quinn said you're the reason I'm on the team."

He scrubs a hand down his face sighing, realisation dawning on him. He looks tired, like maybe he didn't even want to come to this party, but did anyway.

For me?

"Beau," he says carefully. "that's not.. *exactly* what happened.."

Scoffs, not sure whether to believe him or not.

"So it's wrong? You didn't have anything to do with it?"

He grimaces, "No. I guess, I did, but not the way you think. Quite the opposite actually. If anything.. I dissuaded him from picking you."

Okay, confused now.

"Huh?"

Not sure if this is better or worse?

He looks embarrassed now, a slight flush up his neck. "When I said that I" clears throat, "admired you as a swimmer in high-school, I wasn't kidding. Coach already had my spot secured my spot early, and he asked for my opinion.."

He releases a heavy breath. "I was concerned that if you joined our team, I would be..

"Beaten?"

Clears throat again, rubs back of neck this time too. "..no. Distracted."

I'm stunned to silence.

Runs hand through hair. "Or maybe I was hurt or offended that you so obviously hated me so much." He groans, "it was fucking dumb and I was immature. I never should have said anything. Never should have altered your chances because I was offended you didn't like me."

He gnaws on his bottom lip, letting me have a moment to gather my thoughts, patiently waiting my response.

I scratch the side of my head, things still not added up. "So why did Coach go ahead and give me the scholarship then? Of you.. advised otherwise. Why did he go against it?"

Oliver shrugs like it's obvious. "Because he's not blind. Because you're one of the only ones who beat me high-school. Because he saw me watching all

of your races even after I told him that I wouldn't suggest you."

He shakes his head smiling, like he's remembering something, "In fact, I'm pretty sure Coach called me out for my bullshit and told me I'm a shit liar."

I can't help but snort at that. And then I smirk, shaking my head. "Damn Folwer, didn't, realise you were so obsessed with me," I joke.

He rolls his eyes. "I was obsessed with the fact you *bet* me. And then I was curious how you didn't want shit to do with me. And since I couldn't avoid you, being in squad and all—pushed you. Pushed you harder than the rest."

His eyes dropped down my face. "But I was winning now, so no need to obsess over that, *right* ..? No need to be so hard on the guy who ignores you and doesn't give you his attention, because he's not beating me anymore. He's on *my* team now. He swims for my squad and trains under me."

He looks away, his adam apple bobbing. "But I guess I liked his eyes on me a little too much. And maybe I started to obsess over his smart mouth a little more than appropriate."

***

Authors Note:

Hope you enjoyed and not much longer of story to go! Sad times but also gives me the time for new stories! Thanks to the people who follow me! Also appreciate all the support, It honestly makes my day when I see your guy nice comments. Still can't believe some of you guys like it as much as you say, y'all lying.

I put out this chapter later than planned because I have weird life timing. I seem to be in places at perfect time for disasters. Don't want to get gruesome details, but required all the first aid knowledge I got, and an inspiration for a medical story.

Anyway , h ope everyone is good! (And to the person who said they gonna use all their data to read my next update, I hope it was worth it haha)

Chapter 21

Race day...

Nationals is *finally* here.

The day all these days have been building up too has **arrived** .

And it's weird, the day you've been working towards for *months* finally being. The moment you have thought too long about—devoted too much time, all for this. So much time building up to a race that last mere minutes.

I think I'm gonna be sick.

I divert my eyes from the pool, the glistening water taunting me, making my stomach flip. Instead I try focusing on steady breathing and run my sweaty hands against my pants.

All these moments have been working up to this. This one big moment. And I hate that, because it puts pressure on the moment. Builds up this moment to a make it or break moment. Making all these before moments rely on this one outcome to see if it was worth it. If it was worth the hours. Worth the stress. Worth the early mornings. Worth the blood, sweat, tears.

Was it worth it?

It better fucking be worth it, I decide, refusing to believe any other outcome. Otherwise I've put myself through all this shit for what?

But when I really start to think about it, what makes it worth it? The win? The medal around the neck? Because if thats so, a lot of people are not going to be happy. Because there's only one gold at the end of the day.

One winner.

So what about all the others? The people we don't remember who walk away empty handed. Do they think it's worth it? Is the ride better then the reward?

But what about all those days, all those times, we kept on working, kept on pushing in hopes of obtaining that victory so few reach. Was that all empty promises?

I run a heavy hand through my hair, god, this feels fucked. Like entering are game with your emotions, and the odds are not in your favour. I put head in hands, my stomach in knots, chest feeling tight. I wish I was better at dealer with the pressure, I wish I was calmer, like Oliver.

Oliver looks calm, calm and dressed up in our universities gear along with the rest of the team. There's a a lot of teams here actually, each walking with their heads high feeling that pride. Confidence and intimidation radius from people, smiles no where to be seen. There's a palpable tension in the air. The before high roof indoor pool only adds to the air of nobility of the place and the people here.

I'm here feeling like I'm suffocating with the stress, while Oliver seems to be the only one smiling and relaxed. How is it that some people are so calm and collected when in stressful situations?

Can't relate.

God I just hate this feeling. My stomachs doing back flips and I'm not here for it. Want this to be over. Tired of the nerves.

Coach must see I'm not looking too great, and slaps my back telling me to get ready for my races. Tells the team to get their game faces on. Tells me to leave it all on the water and he'll be proud. That makes me stand taller.

***

First race, stretching muscles at the line up. I feel weak and strong all at the same time. Limbs a little jelly. Mind muddles but focused. Body jittery but calm. Can you be two things at once? Cause it think I am.

We are called to take stand on the diving board. Crouches down. I let the crowds noise deafen out. White noise. The entirety of my focus on the water before me. so focused on it, that nobody on the outside could distract me or disrupt my concentration.

The anticipation is torture. This is the worst part I think, the build up of that unanswered question. The unknown so desperately wanted to be known. I try not to over think it and just focus on the first move. The first step, and all the rest just kind of comes naturally. I've done the training, thought the process over and over in my head. Analysed the technique, debated the game plans, gone over strategy. Now is the time for *blank* .
To let my brain be blank and let my body ignite and do the work. To not over think and just do. To trust the work I've done.

Racing came easy, it was the before and after that was the hard part. And while time slowly crept by, it still moved, and my first race got closer and closer until it was time. I shut my brain off, and just do what I do.

And I did.

I didn't come last in my first race, far off actually, came 3rd. Came 2nd for my next. And wasn't too bad for my next 3 races after, even won a fee. I was actually getting better each time; like I was finding my pace, setting my stroke, growing my confidence by every second in the water. It was like I was finding a place I know so well and remembering that I know everything about it. Finding home.

Safe to say I was feeling good, was doing *good* . Swimming feels too mundane of a word, I was *flying* . Fucking flying through the water, and no body could stop me.

I blocked out the rest of my teams performance, and focused on mine. Coach still made everyone watch and support each others races, and for the first time probably ever, I felt a pinch of pride and a good feeling in my

chest when they performed well. Usually it was a little unsettled, like I was threatened, or put pressure of my to perform just as well, but it feels different now. Like I know I'm good and comfortable where I am.

A part I don't think I will forget for a long time though, is when we were all standing watching and cheering as Oliver did his race, the semifinal round 1 qualifying race for the finals. He flew, boy is part fish I swear. Long tan limbs powering through the water like nobodies business. And while it was impressive and hypnotising to watch, it was after the race that I will remember. Because when there was all that noise and cheering, the second after his hand slammed into that wall securing that win, his head swung around.
Searching.
Scanning.
Found .

Eyes locked with mine, and grinning the most gorgeous fucking smile I have seen. And I smiled right back. A smile that said: life is good, and I'm so happy you're here for it. A smile that showed: this is my moment, but I want to share it with *you* .

And when it was me winning round two semi, he was flashing that dazzling smile right back at me. And man it felt good to have someone to share that smile with when things go good.

***

Once again I am racing Oliver Folwer in a final. Feels like fucking déjà. Right back to the beginning, like life has done a full swing around.

Except this feels different, and can't put a finger on why, but it is.

I glance across two lanes along and when Oliver catches my eye he winks. I roll my eyes suppressing my smile. While I'm swimming to win, always, he

doesn't feel as much my competition anymore. Kind of feels like we are on the same team. Like I wouldn't be too bummed if he won.

My eyes skim past to the guy the lane over. Unfortunately Josh, the dick I punched last meet and nearly got kicked off the team because of, is also in the final. But I ignore him and focus on myself. On this race. He's not worth it.

The swimmers stretching and sorting their goggles and caps while the guys on the speaker are talking about each individual swimmer in the race. I block it out and step beside the diving board.

I'm in lane 1. The lane closest to the stands, but also the window. The late afternoon sunlight shines through casting a light below the stand that reaches out across to my diving block and skewed along the water of my lane. The sunlight only extending to my lane, while the left are rest in a shade.

The sunlight makes water glow a gold. Looks like I'll be swimming on sunshine.

Staring at the water before me, I think of Henry. I think of my Mum, of my Father and lack of presence he has had. I think of all the people who are in my life, who were *supposed* to be, and who were supposed stay longer. And then I think about the people that came unexpectedly, Andy, Coach, Oliver. And maybe, all of that is what brought me to stand here today. All the bad decisions, right ones, lack of presence and potent ones. But with way, I made it here.

We are called to stand on the diving board. The sun rays hit my skin, warming me inside out. I stand tall, chin raised, I feel on top of the *fucking* world.

A feeling of overcoming and soaring in my chest. I've come so far to get here. And I'm proud that I got here, despite of all the shit I've dealt with, I still stand here on this board ready to race against the best swimmers in the country. I feel a sense of triumphant, like breaking the surface of water after holding breath for so long. And god fresh air tastes nice.

Usually I'm sick with nerves before races, but there's an eery calmness to me. I scarily calm, the best I ever have, just an eagerness to get in the water.

It's doesn't even feel about winning anymore, its about showing everyone what I can do. What I'm best at. Watch me. Watch me swim without the weight I've been carrying on my shoulders for too long. See how fast I can go with nothing holding me back, nothing slowing me down.

The gun goes off, I dive into the water... nothing weighing me down.

[THE END]

(Well there's actually another part for if u wanted a more detailed end)

Author Note:

I know, I know, I'm a horrible author because I don't tell you the ending, but let you imagine.. but I'm confident that your imagination is capable. There's a few nudges here, come on, I think we all know how it ends.. *wink.
Think I was just trying to make a point with my ending, that maybe it's not even about the outcome, even though we desperately want that win for Beau, but maybe it's about more then that. But we know..

It's been a rollercoaster writing this story, feel like Beau has come a long way. I think this is the first story I have written and actually finished, so that feels cool.

And my excuse for being horribly slow at updating this story I got the chance to compete for my country in the sport I do, so training full time while working full time. My body's always sore and I'm always tired these days. Trying really hard now to make more time to write. Also want to say a big thanks for all this support on this story, tbh wouldn't have finished it without your guys comments motivating me too. Appreciate you guys xx

Hope you enjoyed the story

Chapter 22

Author note: you guys are very insistent, but you're right.. you deserve to see more of Beau and Oliver.

So here you go...

****

I pull myself out of the water with shaky arms and Andy is pulling me into a hug the moment I'm out, he's cheeks split into the biggest grin. "Guess you did it, huh."

"Did what?" I wheeze, still breathing hard. Lungs gone and muscles done for. This race hit different, I felt like I was racing with more heart, and my body is really feeling it now.

"Beat Oliver."

Oh ..

Really?

For the first time ever, that race wasn't about beating Oliver. It wasn't about beating the others, but racing myself—racing for myself. Doing the best I can do. Guess this is just a bonus on the side, but this race wasn't about that.

"I never doubted you," Andy says with a puffed chest, "believed it all along, ya know." He rambles on more crap about how he knew this day would come.

I roll my eyes knowing he's full of shit, but can't wipe the smile, "whatever."

My eyes widen slightly, only fully realising it now. Wait.. if I I beat Oliver (who no one beats) does that *mean* ...

"Andy.. who won?"

I didn't think it was possible for his grin to get any bigger. But it does. "Don't let it explode your ego."

My jaw goes slack.

No...

Really ?

I actually won? Nationals? I don't have much time to process because Coach pulls me into a massive hug, uncaring that I'm going to make his clothes wet.

"You flew kid, I've never seen you fly through the water like that before."

Swimming without a weight holding you down does that.

***

Coach wouldn't stop smiling. Mum texted me like a million times with a range of weird emojis that expressed how happy she was for me, and would have been regardless if I won or not.

The team placed 2nd overall, which everyone is pretty stoked with. Andy swam really well, unfortunately just missing out of the medals. Quinn took out the female competitions, and has been following Andy around like a lovesick puppy to most peoples surprise. She gets a lot of attention from guys, but seems like she's tunnel vision for Andy, who is currently pretty oblivious to it. Poor guy doesn't know what he's in for.

And *I* ... I feel so much lighter. As light a a feather. Swimming is a sport, but that swim—that felt *freeing* . Like years of therapy in one race.

An arm slings around neck pulling into the persons firm side as we walk down hallway. "You did good buddy"

I turn my head to look at him. His hair still damp and content smile on his face." *Yeah?* That's all I get." I tease.

Oliver leans down closer to my ear, "gold looks hot on you babe." He says before teasingly biting my earlobe.

I shiver, cheeks no doubt reddening.

"Mm, that's exactly why I've been working my arse off to get it you know, to show people just how good it looks on me. Think it's really my colour."

He rolls his eyes, but he's grinning.

My phone buzzes. Glances down to see my Fathers name flash.

"You gonna take that?" Oliver asks.

I shove my phone back in bag. "Nah."

I got everything I need right here.

He smiles at me, pulling me even closer to him. We continue on, walking out the indoor swimming building trailing a little behind the team.

I think the team got the memo Oliver and I are something after the race, when he picked me up and spun me around before promptly pressing his lips to mine, (to my total shook and embarrassment). But I'm weak for the guy and quickly forgot about the world around me and melting into his warmth. Him heating me inside out, his excitement for my win, his never ending support—god I really like the guy.

"—just so I'm prepared, how long are you gonna hold this win over me?" Oliver says, breaking me out of the memory, arm still slung over my

shoulders as we walk to the exit, a teasing smile on his lips.

I grin up to him. "I wouldn't hold your breath."

He smirks, eyes glinting. "I wouldn't dream of it."

[The Real End. *Hopefully* .]

A possibility...

Author's note:

I didn't originally want to write more, but some have been asking and putting the idea in my head. And I have started to see a possibility for an extended bit or maybe book 2. Not guarantees anytime soon if it happens, but if there were more to come, I imagine it would kind of go like this...

Oh *fuck* .

fuck
fuck
fuckkkk.

I didn't think this was actually *legit* . That people actually lived in ridiculous house like this...unless they were like Justin Bieber or something? Houses with doors so large and proportionally so far of a real persons size its just showing off how much money you have now. Or gardens to actually have not a leaf out of order, contain nature to not look so naturey.

I haven't even knocked yet, just stood their outside the door gawking at the place. Who knows how long I've been there. I'm probably late now, and I was 10 minutes early.

The door opens, a sandy blonde head peaks around, *Oliver* . He grins and I momentarily forget about the big scary house, reflectively smiling back. What can I say, he brings out the smile in me.

He looks good, tan skin glowing, hair as nice ever, and eyes alight.
He looks happy .

But then he opens the door further and cocks his head to the side. "Well, what you waiting for? Come in."

Oh, thats right—i'm supposes to go in this big fancy expensive house. Step on that pristine marble floor in my, not dirty but not clean, shoes.

His *parents* house.

Thats right, i'm meeting Olivers parents. More than meeting them actually, spending an entire two week here over the break before college starts back up again.

I never met anybodies parents like this before, as someones *boyfriend* . I eye the bush to the side, would anybody notice if I puked in it? Even just a little? I couldn't even kick it over with dirt or anything because it's so flawless that it would defiantly not be notices. I'm pretty sure I have an empty paper bag in my car.

I'm still rooted at the bottom of the stairs to the doorway and Oliver sighs, walking down to grab my hand and pull me up. "Come on babe, dinners ready. Let's eat and then I can show you around." He glances back, our fingers still intertwined, eyes a little lidded, "show you my bedroom."

And then he *winks* .